OCTOBER 2022

AUSTRALIA

PLAYBOY

LET'S TALK
SEX ED!
EXPERIENCES OF SASHEER ZAMATA & JOEL KIM BOOSTER

HERITAGE
INSIDE THE ULTIMATE MALE FANTASY!

In His
DOMAIN
HOW A HUMBLE SKATEBOARDER BUILT A STREET WEAR EMPIRE!

Taylah Bennett

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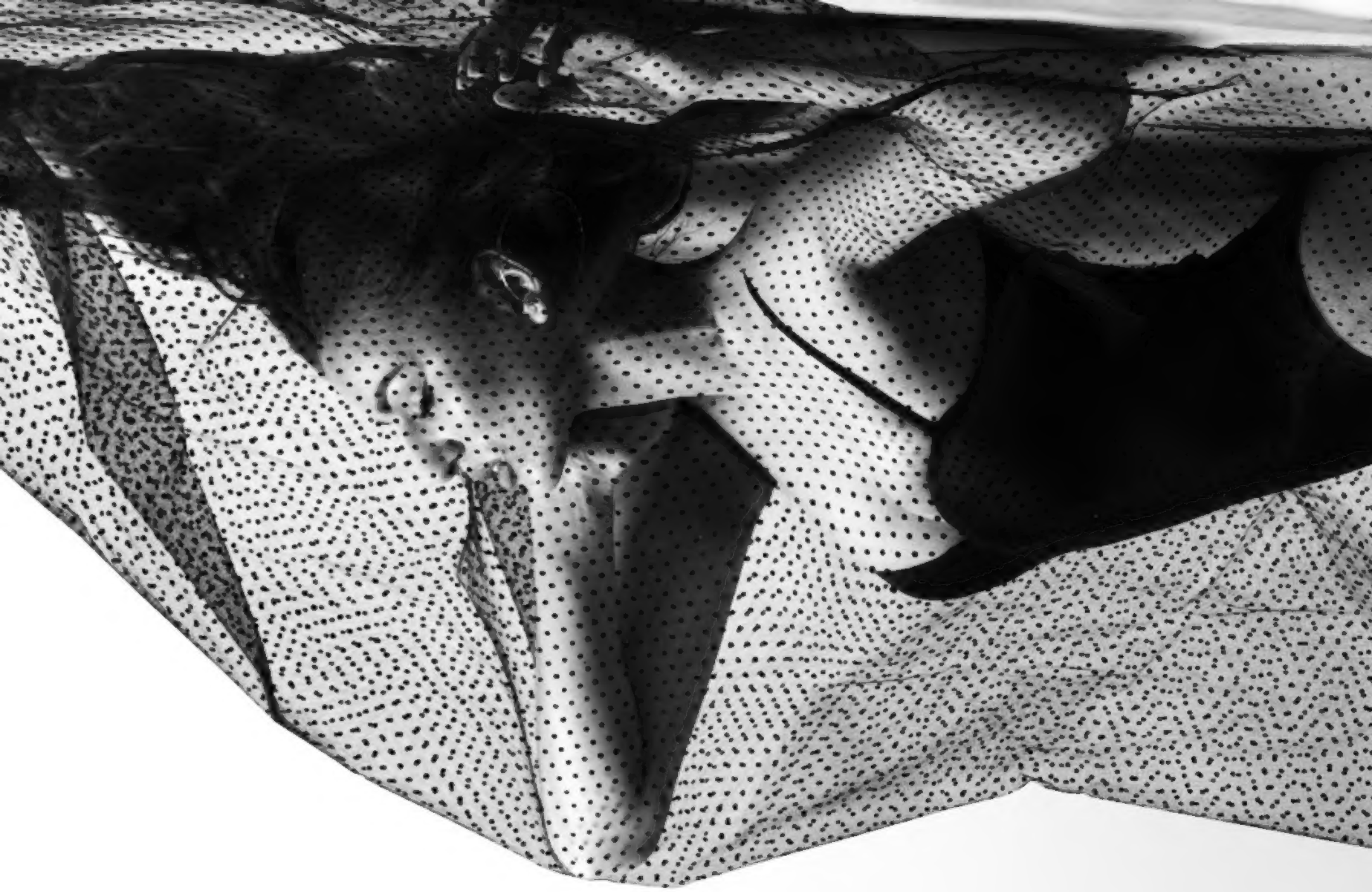

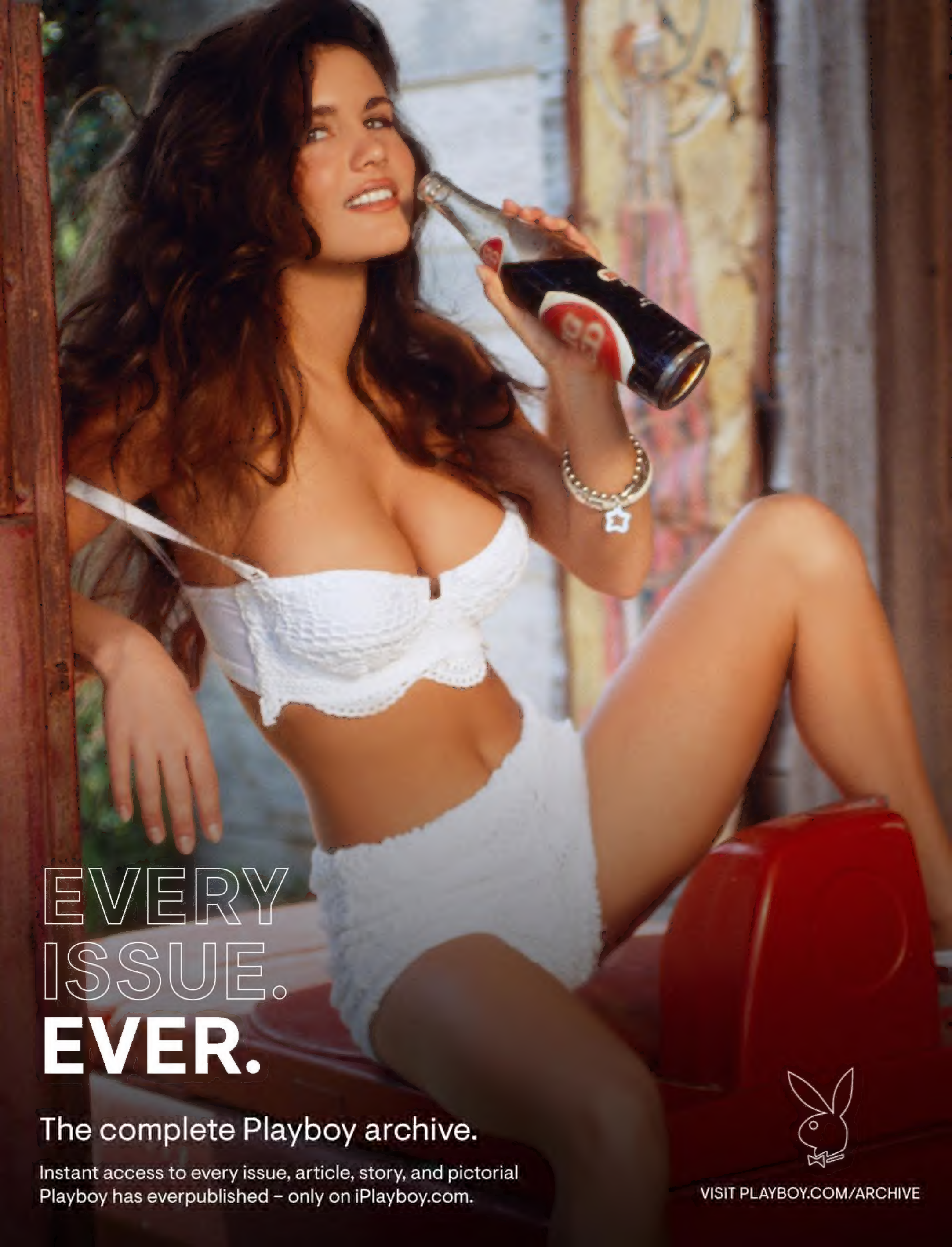
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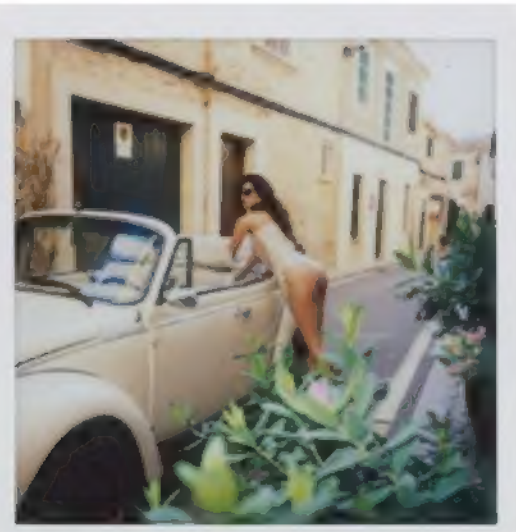
Behind the Lens



It's easy to become so entranced by the women who appear in our pages that you may not always consider the visual artists behind the images. But you should. These photographers are helping to evolve what we internally refer to as "the Playboy gaze"; they're the curators of our representations of beauty, arousal and eroticism. It's no coincidence that our contributing photographers include creatives who challenge tired, sexist standards of beauty throughout their portfolios. This is especially true of our Playmate photographers, whose charge is to make their subjects feel simultaneously comfortable, sexy and in command.

We're proud to recognize the powerful women responsible for this issue's Playmate pictorials. Ali Mitton, who last photographed April 2019 Playmate Fo Porter, flew with Hilda Dias Pimentel to Majorca, Spain, where the October Playmate unleashed her jubilant energy. Meanwhile, Kanya Iwana headed to the beach in Malibu, California with November Playmate Gillian Chan, and Australian transplant Jennifer Stenglein ventured to Joshua Tree, California with Jordy Murray, our December Playmate. We know that those who stand behind the lens are as important to representation as those in front of it, and we celebrate these women and their gorgeous, inspiring work.

Au Naturel in Focus

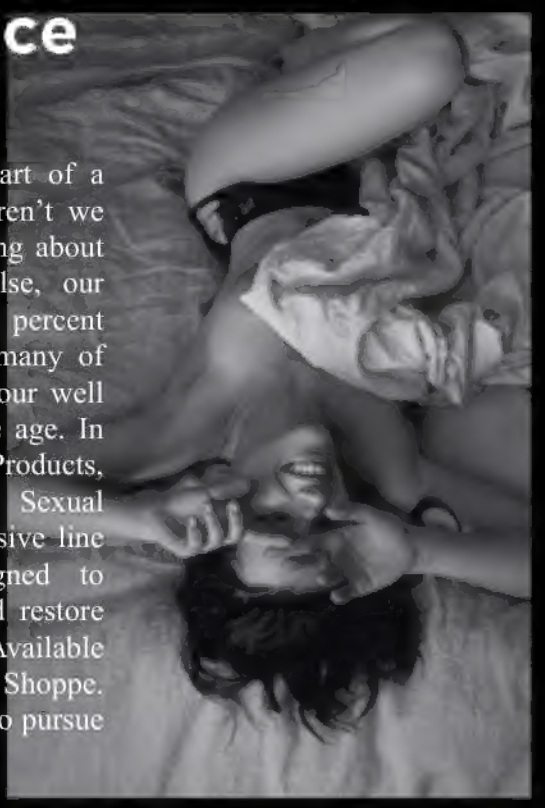
The works of Marilyn Minter, subject of this issue's artist spotlight, Pussy Power, appeared in a special edition of playboy in 2014 — the same year she released Plush, a collection of artwork saluting all shades and lengths of pubic hair. But some of Minter's playboy images went unpublished. Five years later, she returns to our pages to discuss with Kimberly Drew (together with Minter, lower right) what is deemed "appropriate" in the realm of sexual display. "There's nothing wrong with pubic hair, but it has been totally erased in art history," Minter says. While negotiating the publication of Minter's playboy commission (as well as new, never-before-seen work), Senior Editor Liz Suman also arranged for her to speak at the "Art of Sexuality" panel hosted by Playboy in New York City this June. "Learning that not all the previous images had been published was exciting, knowing I could consciously publish the work today," Suman says. "The stigma surrounding pubic hair exemplifies the conflict within dialogues about women defining their own beauty and pleasure."

Shakespeare in the Garden

Playboy's annual Midsummer Night's Dream lingerie party returned this July to Sin City, taking over Marquee Nightclub at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. Inspired by Shakespeare's classic tale of restless lovers on a mystical search for their soulmates, Playboy partnered with Tao Group to transform the nightlife destination into an enchanted forest, complete with spins by DJ Mustard. The event was hosted by a cast of Centerfolds, including August 2018 Playmate Lorena Medina (pictured left).

Confidence Is Sexy

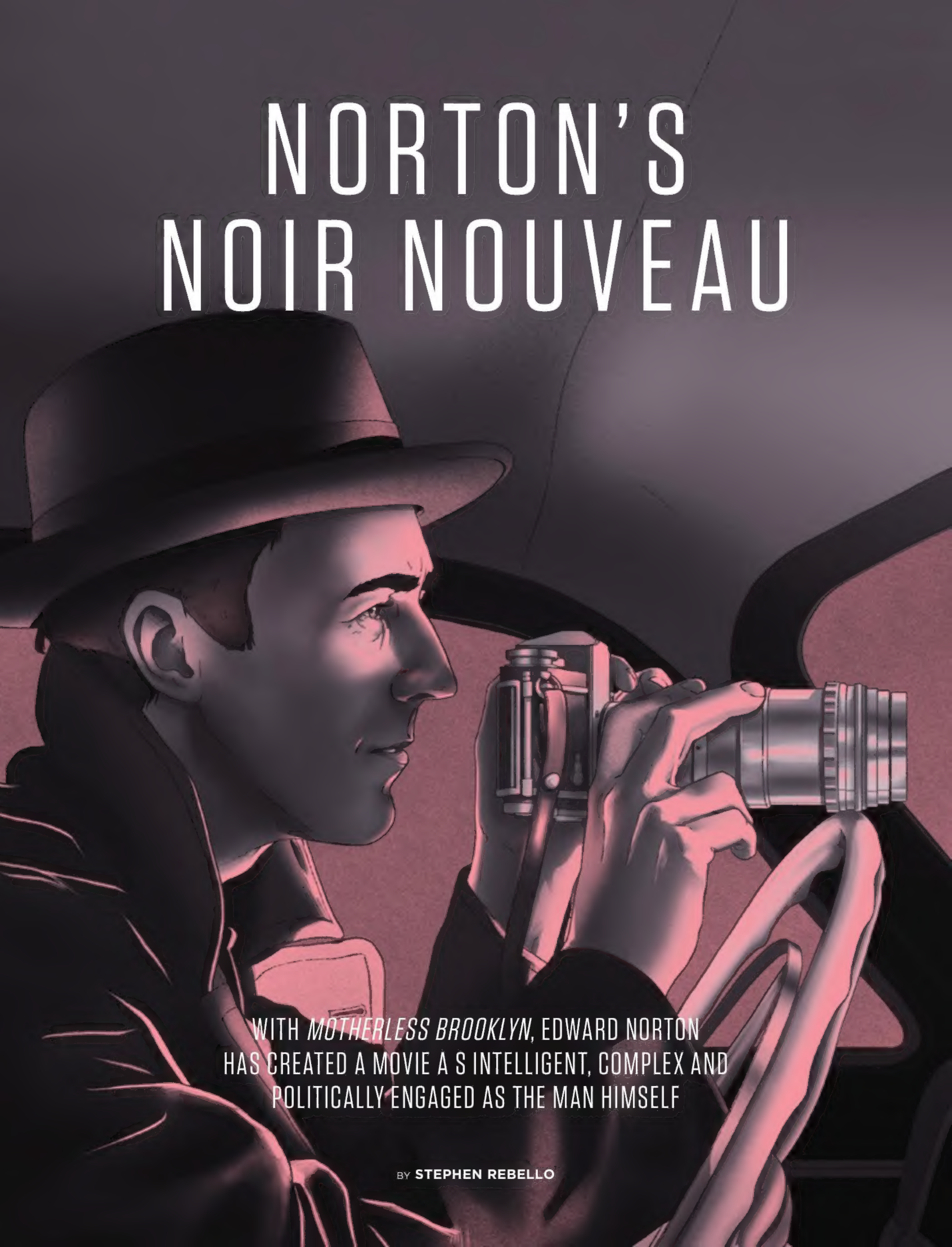
Sex is an important part of a healthy life, so why aren't we more comfortable talking about it? Like everything else, our sex lives won't be 100 percent all the time, and too many of us ignore that part of our well being, especially as we age. In partnership with AVS Products, we introduce Playboy Sexual Wellness, a comprehensive line of supplements designed to reinvigorate, repair and restore your sexual health. Available now at Vitamin Shoppe. Consider yourself free to pursue pleasure.



A Tribute to the Secretly Serious Paul Krassner

Paul Krassner, leader of the Yippie movement, passed away in July at the age of 87. A prominent force at playboy, the longtime editor recruited major names including former Editorial Director Arthur Kretchmer and Lenny Bruce. (Krassner edited the comedian's autobiography.) Despite his strong opinions, Krassner kept an open mind, even agreeing to debate Andrew Breitbart for our December 2011 issue. Former Deputy Editor Stephen Randall fondly remembers Krassner as "a cultural gadfly who knew everyone worth knowing and who took things seriously — but hid that he was taking them seriously."

NORTON'S NOIR NOUVEAU



WITH *MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN*, EDWARD NORTON HAS CREATED A MOVIE A S INTELLIGENT, COMPLEX AND POLITICALLY ENGAGED AS THE MAN HIMSELF

BY **STEPHEN REBELLO**

The thing about Edward Norton is he was never really here — or so it seemed. Sure, as a 26-year-old in his first big movie, 1996's *Primal Fear*, his hair-raising performance as a possibly homicidal altar boy nabbed him an Oscar nomination. Critics and moviegoers started asking, between breathless comparisons to everyone from DiCaprio to Hoffman, *Who is this guy?*

But as vivid as he could be on-screen, offscreen Norton ghosted us all. Letting the work tell the story, he made a shell game out of his dealings with the press, shunning interviews and ducking questions about his personal life — especially when he bulked up by 30 pounds and scored a best actor Oscar nomination for his gut-wrenching neo-Nazi turn in 1998's *American History X*.

Through the aughts, Norton continued to protect his off-camera life while keeping his screen profile high, if unclassifiable. He mostly avoided Hollywood cash grabs, gravitating instead to a range of complex roles: a pornographer's soft- spoken lawyer, a feckless drug dealer, a bipolar dude with a latent flair for violence, a green superhero with rage issues and an egomaniacal actor — for, respectively, cream-of-the-crop directors MiloS Forman (*The People vs. Larry Flynt*), Spike Lee (*25th Hour*), David Fincher (*Fight Club*), Louis Leterrier (*The Incredible Hulk*) and Alejandro G. Iñárritu (*Birdman;* yet another Oscar nomination).

By then a certain reputation had emerged, one fed by Norton's widely publicized head-on collisions with the directors of *American History X* and *Red Dragon* and the battles with Marvel that likely factored into Mark Ruffalo taking over as the Hulk. One common denominator: By many accounts, if Norton thought a script needed an overhaul, he'd doctor it himself and try to persuade the director to get onboard.

Then he went relatively quiet, aside from supporting turns in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *Collateral Beauty*, and voice stints in *Sausage Party* (he helped Seth Rogen get that one made) and *Isle of Dogs*. Was Norton staging a vanishing act? Had he become one of those actors, per endless online speculation, that *Hollywood won't hire?*

Not so fast. Aside from being busy as a husband (to movie producer Shauna Robertson), the father of a now six-year-old son, a scuba diver and pilot, a tireless environmental advocate, a trustee of an affordable-housing nonprofit and a producer on more than a dozen documentaries and feature films (including last year's Gotti), Norton has been quietly preparing to step back into the spotlight.

The $26 million movie *Motherless Brooklyn*, in wide release this November, revolves around his performance as Lionel Essrog — a sad, solitary private detective with Tourette syndrome who struggles to make sense of a morally and politically rancid world following the murder of his mobbed-up mentor (Bruce Willis). Watching the gritty yet open- heartedly romantic movie, which Norton also directed, produced and adapted from Jonathan Lethem's 1999 novel, you can almost feel the man stepping out and showing us what matters to him, what's eating at him, what he thinks of the state of things in America in 2019. *So that's who Edward Norton is*.

Speaking almost as rapidly and obsessively as his gumshoe protagonist, Norton describes his near 20-year campaign to launch the movie, whose knockout cast includes Alec Baldwin, Willem Dafoe, Bobby Cannavale, Gugu Mbatha-Raw (pictured above with Norton in a scene from the film), Michael K. Williams and Leslie Mann. "My emotional connection to the book was this character who lets you know from the beginning, 'I've got something wrong with my head,' " he says. "You almost instinctively feel aligned with him from square one, because you're inside his brain and you feel how fucked-up and chaotic his condition is. You can hear from deep down inside that he's not, as people call him, a 'freak show' but a smart, sensitive soul. In many ways, he's in the best tradition of afflicted underdog heroes, like in *Rain Man, Forrest Gump, A Beautiful Mind, Good Will Hunting*. We connect with our better selves by cheering for them."

While Lethem set his novel in contemporary New York, Norton's script throws things back to paranoid, bigoted urban life in the 1950s, pitting his hero against a set of social attitudes, prejudices and politically powerful monsters that, in the dark shadow of current events, seem all too apt. "I wanted to do a serious noir," he explains, "not the clichéd, glossy, Americanized dime-store version — a movie that said, 'Look, there's a lot of skeevy shit going on, a lot of stuff churning underneath the surface, and we ignore it at our peril.' I mean, it isn't coincidental that *Chinatown* arrived on the cusp of Watergate, the end of the Vietnam war and after its director's wife had been murdered by Manson followers. I set this movie in a 1950s New York that was beyond crime, when things were being done at a level so antagonistic to what we think of as 'America' that the city was under the almost autocratic, imperial rule of a Darth Vader who exerted his will on everything."

As perfectionistic and self-critical as Norton can be about his work behind and before the camera (of this project he admits, "I have a sort of creeping contentment about it"), he's effusive when it comes to his collaborators — including his aforementioned Darth Vader, played by Baldwin.

"Alec has such a unique combination of charm and terrible power to intimidate," Norton says. "I wrote quite an aria for him, a celebration of brute power. And when he dug down and delivered that monologue in which his character talks about how, if he wanted to do it with a 'colored girl' in a hotel room, then pow, he was going to do it as his right and privilege, he was lethal. I saw the crew's jaws hit the floor."

Cast as the movie's most abusive power broker, Baldwin conjures the toxic essence of the influential predators and racists currently making headlines. Therein may lie the key to Norton's elusive, undeniable genius.

"The best feeling," he says, "is when it resonates like a tuning fork with the times we live in." ■

ILLUSTRATION BY **SARAH MAXWELL**

MY SEX EDUCATION

Shame, misinformation, indomitable hormones — **Sasheer Zamata** and **Joel Kim Booster** take us back to school

THE ONLY THING MORE TERRIFYING THAN SEX-ED SCARE TACTICS IS THE WAY I TREATED MY MECHANICAL CHILD

BY **SASHEER ZAMATA**

I was walking down the street not too long ago, and I overheard a full adult woman say, "I didn't know you could get pregnant on your first try!" That's when I realized the world desperately needs better sex education.

I'm including myself in that statement. I had a mortifying moment in college when one of my friends explained how the guy she was sleeping with only wanted to do "doggy style." I responded, "That's crazy. He only wants to do anal?" There was silence, and one of my friends slowly asked, "So…do you think when dogs have sex they're always doing it anally?" And I guess when you say it out loud, it sounds dumb. Of course they're not always doing it anally — most of them save that for birthdays and bribes. But I wasn't thinking of the logistics of canine coitus. I honestly wasn't thinking of sex at all, because I was taught not to.

I was raised in Indiana, and my sex education was pretty much "don't." I remember a slide show of STIs in my middle school health class featuring images of cauliflower sprouting out of someone's ass, or blood and pus oozing from someone's eyeball, and those were used as evidence for why we should abstain. I went to a public school, so they weren't telling us to save ourselves for religious reasons — they just weren't telling us anything.

Our class participated in the Baby Think It Over program, in which students take care of a robot baby to learn how hard it is to care for a human baby. I guess we were supposed to "think over" whether or not it's worth it to have kids while still in school. I had killed multiple Tamagotchis by this point, so I wasn't feeling good about my chances of being a good robot mom, but I wanted to at least pass the assignment.

The baby had a computer in it to record how often I fed, held, changed and nurtured it (which is kind of what I currently do in my relationship). It would also cry, and I just had to guess why (which is what my partner does in our relationship). It was so annoying. Sometimes I just let the baby wail because I was busy with other homework. There was one day when I ran to the bus while holding my bundle of joy, and her head was flopping back and forth, so that probably wasn't good. At the end of the experiment, the teacher pulled together all the counts of neglect and abuse to give me a grade. Apparently I had a lot of counts of neglect and abuse. Someone from Child Protective Services — I'm hoping an intern and not someone who could be helping real children — came to my school to talk to all the bad student-parents. They took me into a room and warned me that if this were a real baby, they would take her from me. And my response was, "Good! I didn't ask for this baby!" They didn't care about my protest.

I wish I had said, "You know what would've been more useful? Telling me how not to have a baby instead of showing me how hard life is with one. Embarrassing me in class by making me roll a condom over a banana so I'm not too embarrassed to do it with an actual penis in front of me. Giving me language I can use to ask my partners about their sexual history and health so I'm not speechless in the moment. Teaching me that sex can be an enjoyable experience between consenting parties and doesn't have to be a shameful, detrimental act."

It can be easy not to have a baby if you don't want one — you just need access to resources and information, which is getting tougher these days. Let's keep spreading knowledge so people can have more control of their lives and know how to get rid of the cauliflower in their butt. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RICK RODNEY**

No one had to teach me how to come. Every afternoon, I'd lie on the cold linoleum of my family's bathroom, turn on the shower for sonic camouflage and get to work on myself. Like a prodigy with no formal training, I was a natural. Maybe I couldn't read sheet music, and the finger placement was definitely off, but lying there, clutching my instrument, I learned what my body was capable of.

My parents, blue- collar conservative Christians, homeschooled me for most of my adolescence in an attempt to protect me from the secular world and its corrupting notions of liberalism and science. For their own edification they purchased a book on talking to your son about sex, which I would secretly take from their shelves and study solemnly in my bed at night. There I discovered that my white pee was actually called "semen" and, in the final and shortest chapter, titled simply "Homosexuality," that the urges I'd been visualizing while making the white pee (fueled by old Archie comic books) were unnatural and wrong. Turned out all those tiny, messy miracles weren't miracles at all.

If instinct was my teacher, then shame became my tutor. In the years that followed, I'd spend approximately 15 minutes of each day on that bathroom floor and the rest of my waking hours working out how and when I'd be going to hell for it.

Soon I graduated from the bathroom to a corner of our basement, where my parents had foolishly placed our brand-new computer. The creaky stairwell served as a de facto lookout while I entered such imaginative terms into the pre-Google search bar as gay and *gay sex*. In the waning days of dial-up it wasn't unusual for me to wait a full 20 minutes as our Dell PC loaded, line by line, a horrifically photoshopped image of George Clooney receiving a blow job from Brad Pitt. I learned about anal sex from erotic gay fan fiction, which always made it seem so simple and spontaneous. Obi-Wan never once shat on Qui-Gon's dick. Maybe it was the Force.

When I turned 16, my parents reluctantly sent me off to public school. My entry into the real world would coincide with our school district's mandatory sex-ed class, years too late to be anything but an exercise in not making eye contact with the teacher. By this point all of us had enrolled in a rigorous course of our own design, consisting of facts and fictions cobbled together from internet porn and various misremembered half-truths some older brother brought home from college. It was like a game of telephone played by hundreds of teenage boys with wild ideas about the viability of their sperm in a hot tub.

After little more than a month at public school, I tearfully came out to a friend during lunch period. A short lifetime of shame and mortal fear — I set it all aside in that moment because the smell of Axe body spray got me hard. Sadly, it still does. The sex-ed class came to an end, but my education did not. (That same year I met my first boyfriend, who was also the first man I heard whisper "teeth" with erotic caution as I gave head for the first time, a VHS tape of his eighth-grade production of *The Music Man* playing in the background.) Every new experience, even the many, *many* humiliating ones, felt like a revelation.

"That was sex!" I would say to myself. I eventually realized that it wasn't, but I would go on to learn things they forgot to teach us: about consent, about the different ways we experience desire, about the ways our bodies betray us. But I still go back to those teenage moments — fucking in the backseat of a Pontiac Sunfire parked inconspicuously in an empty Target lot — when it all felt miraculous again. ■

FOR AMERICAN KIDS LIKE ME, SEX ED HAS ALWAYS BEEN EQUAL PARTS CLASSROOM AND SCHOOLYARD (WITH A HEALTHY DASH OF BASEMENT REC ROOM)

BY **JOEL KIM BOOSTER**

SUZAN
Akyüz
Instagram @suzan.akyuz

You have a very exotic look, what is your ethnicity? Haha, why thank you! I'm half Italian and half Turkish! I'm very proud of my ethnicity.

Where were you born? Where do you live now? I was born in New Jersey and I am currently living in New Jersey, I plan to move out of state soon.

Favorite color? Ahh it's changed depending on my vibe, I'd say red or black.

Favorite movie of all time? Hmm, that's a tough one. I have many but Kill Bill because I love revenge...

Favorite music artist of all time? I have two! Lana del Rey and Ville Valo from the band H.I.M. The only musicians I will listen to, I'm very picky with my music. It has to touch the depths of my soul or I get bored of it.

Beach or pool? Beach! How can you compare?

Read the book or watch the movie? Watch the movie! I rather read non-fiction.

What foreign county would you like to travel to and why? Finland or Germany! I started learning some Finnish. To my knowledge, it's very peaceful there and its crime rate is one of the lowest in the world and for Germany, I would like to celebrate Oktoberfest.

Biggest turn-on? Biggest turn-off? The biggest turn-on for me is when I have a soul-to-soul connection! When I connect with someone intellectually, emotionally, and physically! it's just a rare vibe. Being listened to is simple... to be understood in a deeper way is sexy. The biggest turn-off is an arrogant, fake person. A guy who stares too obviously at every creature while on a date with their girlfriend/wife... Yikes.

Describe your perfect date. A perfect date would be to have a fancy elegant candlelight dinner and then to go out dancing afterward. I also like surprises, I'm pretty open as long as it's a great experience for me

Describe yourself using 3 adjectives: Kind, crazy, witty.

Tell us a secret about you nobody else knows... I'm so transparent with everyone for the most part but I'm very psychic and I can read people fairly easily. Haha.

Where is your favorite vacation destination and why? California it's really been a catalyst for my mind's expansion. The beaches, cities and people are so beautiful there and that's where I plan to relocate to.

Congrats on your Playboy Finland feature! What does this mean to you? This means absolutely everything to me! It's a big milestone in my modeling career and I have worked so hard for this moment. I proved to myself that anything I want to achieve is possible as long as I never give up on myself! I'm full of gratitude!

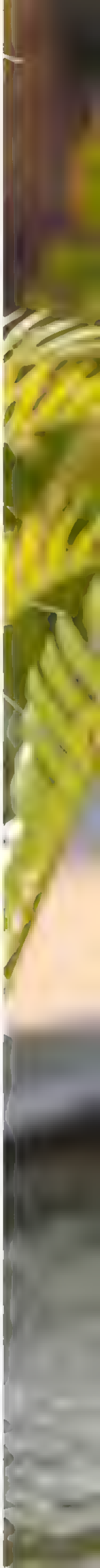
What do you think of when it comes to Playboy and the iconic bunny? It's like a club that allows you to be sexy, fun, flirty, playful and free. That's what it's all about. Owning your sexuality and being playful about it no matter who you are.

Describe your photo shoot: The photo shoot for Playboy was intense I'm not going to lie. A lot goes on behind the scenes behind every perfect shot. You have to really get out of your head and be in your body and just feel the vibe of being sexy. I had 4 outfits, my own changing room in the OC mansion, my own Photographer, my own chair and my amazing makeup artist. I honestly felt like a diva. We shot at different locations within the mansion, and it was scorching hot out luckily, I got to dip in that pool. I almost felt like I was going to pass out haha but it feels good.

If you could change any one thing in the world, what would it be and why? I would just change all the lies and injustice in the world by being a force of truth and justice. So many bad people get away with their crimes and the innocent never seems to get justice.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? I see myself relocated, A profitable successful business, still doing photo shoots because I never age ;) Possibly settle down with a person who adds to my life and is the perfect person for me, my dream home, travel the entire world and so much stability in all areas of my life.

Where can our readers find you? On my social media Instagram: Suzan.akyuzx, TikTok: Suzan.akyuzx,Twitter: Suzanakyuz3 and OnlyFans : Turkishbarbi.



JOKER

WITS AND GIGGLES

With Joker bringing an iconic grin back to theaters, we consider why the diabolical hedonist continues to captivate us — even if we never figure him out

BY **ANTHONY BREZNICAN**

It's the bared teeth. Slightly yellow but still gleaming between the candy-apple lips. Clenched and hungry. Ruthless. You wouldn't call the Joker's expression a smile — not unless you were kidding yourself.

There's agony in the villain's bloodthirsty grin. There's rage behind the eyes, battling against the pain for dominance. Maybe there's a smear of satisfaction — let's face it, the man loves his work — but he isn't necessarily happy. He's ferocious.

In the nearly eight decades since he began menacing the good people of Gotham City, the Joker has taken on many identities, worn many faces and had many names. Just like the devil himself.

Still, for all his varying origin stories, he's instantly recognizable, and not just for the green hair, pale skin and purple suits. All Jokers share an unrepentant delight in chaos for its own sake; their antics aim to torment the helpless and innocent, and they're always able to spring surprises on Batman, a hero who prides himself on preparing for the worst.

In its official character biography, DC Comics lists the Joker's defining power as "complete unpredictability." That aligns perfectly with his latest screen incarnation which released on October 4 Joaquin Phoenix stars in the savage, heartbreaking R-rated character drama titled simply Joker. The film spirals into the ruined psychology of a man named Arthur Fleck, a wannabe stand-up comic who makes ends meet as a clown for hire on Gotham's mean streets. Crippling mental illness and a long history of abuse make it increasingly difficult for Fleck to deal with life's mounting indignities and defeats. He's a constant punch line, until the day he snaps and decides to hit back. But in true Joker fashion, each of the film's seeming revelations only raises more uncertainty about its main character.

"I really like the idea of something that challenges the audience," Phoenix tells PLAYBOY. "Every time I felt we were certain about what motivated his actions, I became less interested. We would constantly try to challenge ourselves while making it. There's not one moment, not one catalyst that creates this character. The pleasure for me in being part of it was not having the easy answers."

The Wayne family looms over the story, but there's no giant bat here; the Joker's nemesis is within. This is the DC Comics version of *Taxi Driver*, or *The King of Comedy* featuring Norman Bates instead of Rupert Pupkin. It's no coincidence that Robert De Niro turns up as a late-night talk-show host revered by the main character.

Arthur Fleck is a name comic book fans won't recognize, an original creation of director and co-writer Todd Phillips, the filmmaker behind the *Hangover* t rilogy. P hillips a cknowledges that he could have made the same movie about a struggling comedian who turns homicidal without any of the DC Comics framework. But what's the fun in that?

"There's a spirit in me, and I know it's in Joaquin, of taking something revered and fucking with it a little," Phillips says. "The comic-book movie world is this unstoppable machine, and this movie isn't going to stop it and probably won't change it. But to take it and turn it on its head a little? That's actually very Joker."

The film does honor one part of the Joker tradition: It clashes with everything that came before. "It's a great character for filmmakers, writers, comic book artists and actors to have fun with and play with, because there are no rules," Phillips says. "That's the point: What kind of rules are you going to break with the Joker?"

As the villain tells Batman in 1988's graphic novel *The Killing Joke*, w ritten by A lan Moore and i llustrated by Brian Bolland, "If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice! *Ha ha ha!*"

No one needs to hear Batman's origin story again. Schoolchildren can recite the details of Thomas and Martha Wayne's

ILLUSTRATION BY **BUTCHER BILLY**

alleyway death — and young Bruce's vow for justice — like the pledge of allegiance. The Joker, by contrast, has always been an enigma, a chameleon, a shape-shifter. Comic book scribes and moviemakers have outdone one another in recent decades, creating a panoply of alt-histories for this snickering trickster. None of the Joker backstories is more true or valid than any of the others, and that's how DC prefers to keep it.

"Like a lot of mysterious characters, he works because we don't know his origin — and he's often portrayed as an unreliable narrator," says comics legend Jim Lee, DC's publisher and chief creative officer. "Even when he's telling you, 'This is how I came to be,' you don't know if it's the truth or not.'"

That became a defining part of director Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, in which Heath Ledger, in his Oscar-winning turn as the Joker, uses a ventriloquist-dummy voice to unspool conflicting tall tales about his ghastly facial scars. Tragic backstories can create empathy for a character, says screenwriter David S. Goyer, who has a "story by" credit on the 2008 box-office juggernaut. The filmmakers were more interested in arousing fear and anxiety, and nothing accomplishes that like someone lying to your face.

"We thought we shouldn't do an origin story," Goyer says. "We should just make him exist, and furthermore, we should make him slippery, with these sort of *Choose Your Own Adventure* origin stories. When we first posed that to Warner Bros., even after the success of *Batman Begins*, they balked: 'How can you do that?' and 'Which one of these is true?' We said, 'You're never going to get the answer.' That's one of the reasons he was truly scary."

The Joker first appeared, without explanation, in the spring of 1940, cutting a path of murder, robbery and mayhem through Gotham City in Batman No. 1. The Caped Crusader himself had debuted less than a year earlier, as a masked vigilante in *Detective Comics No. 27*. As the crime fighter's popularity

soared, the Joker became a way for creators Bob Kane and Bill Finger to pit their stoic, shadowy hero against a flamboyant, wisecracking foil. Even in their first clash, the Joker manages to draw out Bruce Wayne's sense of humor. "You may be the Joker, but I'm the king of clubs," Batman says, delivering a groaner of a dad joke with a right hook to the Joker's jaw.

Eleven years after the character's debut, Finger wrote a backstory in 1951's Detective Comics No 168 that identifies the Joker as the Red Hood, a burglar in a tuxedo and a faceconcealing crimson dome who is discolored and disfigured after plunging into a vat of chemicals during a failed heist. The Killing Joke expanded on Finger's story 37 years later by adding that the Joker had been a struggling stand-up comedian before he became the Red Hood out of financial desperation. The 2014–2015 comics series Batman: Endgame proposed an even more eccentric origin, implying that the Joker is a supernatural near-immortal who, like Stephen King's Pennywise in It, turns up throughout Gotham's grim history.

We've all crossed paths with his type many times. The greater fear is becoming him.

Some things stick, some don't.

"Whatever is embraced by fans and readers is what accumulates as canon," Lee says.

In 1989, Tim Burton's Batman created yet another new identity for the character, with Jack Nicholson playing mid-level gangster Jack Napier, the triggerman who murdered the Waynes during a mugging. There's no Red Hood, but the movie retains the notion that being mutilated in a chemical bath drove Napier to madness. From there, the cautious Napier becomes a wild man. He indulges. He takes what he wants. He destroys anyone in the way.

"That makes Jack Nicholson's Joker one of the stronger versions we have available," says University of California, Los Angeles clinical psychologist Andrea Letamendi, who explores the psychology behind superhero storytelling on the Arkham Sessions podcast. "This is his true nature, and he's found a way to express himself and actualize those inner feelings of chaos and destruction. He's enjoying his life so much."

The Joker's brazen lack of remorse is one source for the disturbing combination of attraction and repulsion that he inspires in us. "We don't feel safe around this person," Letamendi says. "Our natural inclination is to be fearful and avoid him. But that freedom and sense of enjoyment of his experience lures us in."

Call it toxic charisma. From Cesar Romero's amused, alliteration-spouting antagonist on the campy 1960s TV series to Mark Hamill's dastardly and dashing 1990s version on Batman: The Animated Series, one of the unifying Joker traits is magnetism.

"This is why Jared Leto fell flat for us," Letamendi says of the so-called Juggalo Joker from 2016's Suicide Squad. "The edginess went so far, but he didn't have the charm or appeal. He was supposed to be tatted up and cool, but that's different than genuine charm."

The Joker's flexibility has made him a nearly infinite resource for DC. "He can manifest himself in various forms because he's a modern-day boogeyman," Lee says. "He's beguiling in his own way because he's so over-the-top."

The company is so confident in the Joker's mainstream appeal that, in addition to the new film, it released three comic-book titles about him in October, each featuring a different mythology. Two of them — Kami Garcia's Joker/Harley: Criminal Sanity, and John Carpenter and Anthony Burch's The Joker: Year of the Villain — dropped on the same day, October 9, while Jeff Lemire's Joker: Killer Smile hit three weeks later.

Asked why he thinks the Joker provides such rich material for storytellers, Phoenix points to the malevolence in the clown's eyes.

"When you don't have a definitive, clear backstory, it allows us to project our ideas on it. And that engages us. The character forces us to examine ourselves and our behavior."

The actor grins, wide and sinister. "Also, son of a bitch — he just looks cool."

In that reading, the Joker remains fascinating not because he's aberrant but because he's a funhouse mirror. We've all crossed paths with his type many times. The greater fear is not becoming his victim but becoming him. In all his forms, the Joker is someone who has lost his humanity. He feels nothing except selfishness. He can only rid himself of hurt by inflicting it on others. We recognize the mercilessness. We know the narcissism. We sense the misery tearing him to pieces from within.

We could almost feel sorry for the Joker, if only he weren't laughing at us. ■

KEITH HUFNAGEL

Man in His Domain

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ATIBA JEFFERSON**

BY **YASI SALEK**

NEARLY TWO DECADES AFTER LAUNCHING HUF FROM A MODEST STOREFRONT IN SAN FRANCISCO, THE ACCIDENTAL TASTEMAKER IS USHERING HIS EMPIRE INTO A NEW ERA OF SKATING AND STYLE

It wasn't Keith Hufnagel's idea to name his clothing brand after himself. Anne Freeman, his wife at the time, suggested it when they started the company back in 2002, even pushed for it. Hufnagel had been using his nickname, Huf, on his pro-model skateboard decks for some time, and his sponsors put it on Tshirts. He'd built a personal brand around the name already; it was only a matter of transferring it to his new venture. He felt sort of insecure about it, but he did it anyway. Although they later divorced, Freeman remained involved with the company until 2013, and the name she helped mint remains to this day.

"If you look out in the world, there are tons of brands with people's names on them, and you may not even know who they are. Like, do you know who Louis Vuitton is?" Hufnagel asks me.

I do not, in fact, know who Louis Vuitton is or was, despite owning at least one of his purses, so I get Hufnagel's point. You build a brand, time passes, and you as a person become just one helix in its DNA. Or at least that's the goal. I do know who Keith Hufnagel is, however, and so do a lot of other people — mostly skateboarders and skateboarding fans but streetwear devotees too.

When I first interviewed Hufnagel, back in 2005, HUF was a small clothing line with just two stores in San Francisco, some very limited-edition sneaker collaborations and a lot of buzz. Almost 15 years later, we're at HUF headquarters in downtown L.A., talking in his office, which is filled with clothing patterns and art pieces, including a giant pigeon sculpture by artist-skater and HUF collaborator Todd Francis. Hufnagel is wearing black twill HUF work pants, a white HUF-logo pocket T-shirt and Adidas shell toes.

This is where Hufnagel spends most days. On the floor, leaning against the wall is a large poster for the footwear company Lakai featuring a grinning blond boy carrying a tiny skateboard. "Keenan did some modeling," Hufnagel tells me. His six-year-old son with his current wife, Mariellen, was named after Keenan Milton, a professional skateboarder who passed away in 2001. He was Hufnagel's contemporary and best friend. About a year after Milton's death, Hufnagel started HUF. He was 28 at the time.

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Keith Hufnagel was born in New York City in 1974 to a nurse and a computer technician. He grew up in Stuyvesant Town–Peter Cooper Village, an 80-acre post–World War II residential development bound by First Avenue to the west, 23rd Street to the north and 14th Street to the south. "Everyone in the neighborhood was skateboarding," he tells me. "This group of kids used to hang out at Midtown Plaza, and they would skate in those little dead-end streets. We'd all ride, and I learned how to ollie. Then, for my 13th birthday, I got a real professional-style skateboard."

From that day on, Hufnagel never stopped skateboarding. "It was a passion, or it was an addiction, whatever you want to call it," he says. "It was my path." Skateboarding was an entry point into a new community, into new geography. "The whole thing is social, because you're meeting people and staying connected with them and going to skate their areas. I met Chris Keeffe in my area and then went out to Woodside, Queens and skated his area. Then I met Jon Buscemi and Gino Iannucci and went out to Long Island and hung with them. And then there's Mike Hernandez in the Bronx and Ryan Hickey in Brooklyn, and all of a sudden New York is no longer this small little city."

New York in the early 1990s is a time of myth. Hufnagel's scene included skaters who would become big names, such as Iannucci and Hickey, but also Brian Donnelly, the artist now known as KAWS, and filmmaker Harmony Korine, who immortalized the world of Hufnagel's high school years with his screenplay for the 1995 film Kids, which featured other members of the scene: Justin Pierce, Leo Fitzpatrick and, most famously, Chloë Sevigny.

In 1992 Hufnagel packed up and moved to San Francisco, ostensibly to attend college but more to pursue skateboarding. "I saw California as the mecca for skateboarding," he says, "and at that time San Francisco had the biggest scene. It was where all the footage was coming from."

If New York is where Hufnagel found his passion, San Francisco is where he made that passion a profession. He turned pro halfway through his freshman year, joining a company called Fun Skateboards. He was skating all the time and traveling to film in Europe and Japan. Soon he had to make a choice. He chose his passion. He dropped out of school and kept skateboarding.

I ask him what "going pro" entails. "First you have to understand there are no actual rules in skateboarding," he says. "If someone says you're pro, you're pro, which means your name goes on a skateboard and you get paid a royalty. You basically become your own brand." When Fun Skateboards folded in 1994, Hufnagel was picked up by Real. For the next eight years, he built his brand. He moved to L.A., then back to San Francisco, kept traveling the world, kept living his dream.

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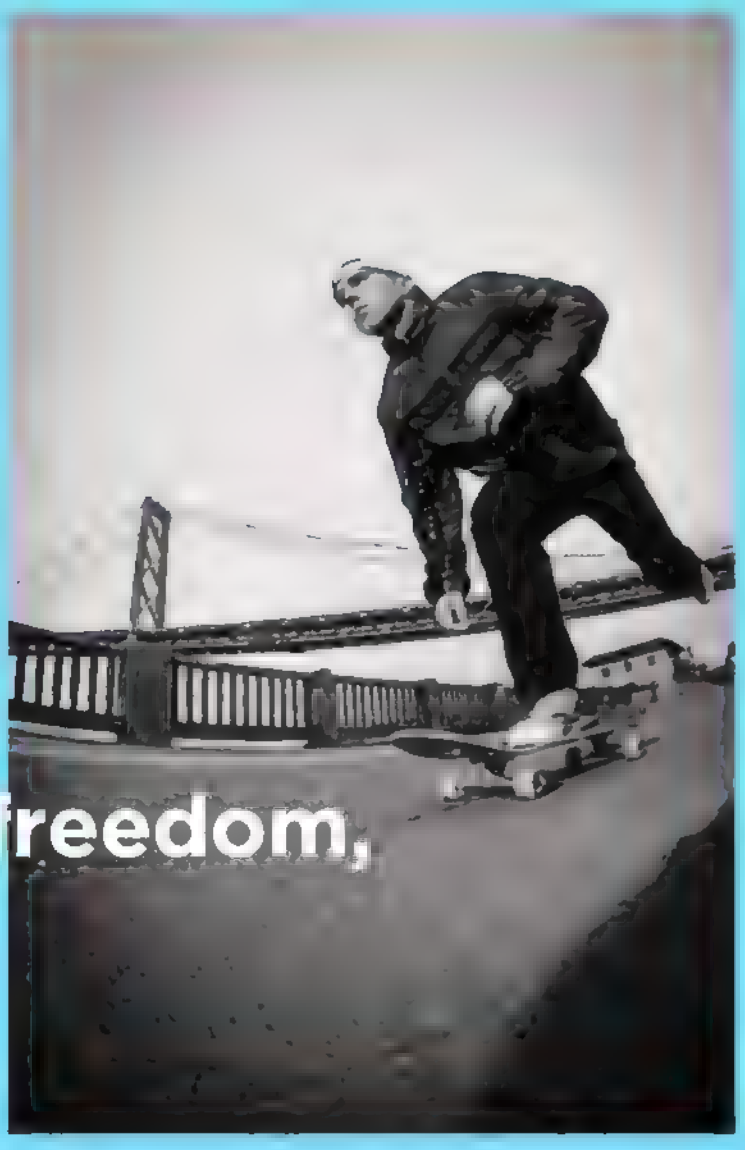
Historically, skateboarding has been a sport fundamentally about pleasure. Skateboarding is about freedom, adrenaline, creativity. Art has always played a crucial role: Most skate decks have boundary-pushing graphics designed by fringe and underground artists. Music too: Ask people from a certain generation how they discovered their favorite bands, and a common answer will be that they found them through skate videos. A lot of skateboarders became artists, musicians or filmmakers. Skateboarding is a social organizer: You skate with your friends and hang out with other skaters. Skateboarding is a party. "You can go to a place, drink beer, skate all night," Hufnagel says. "You can drink and smoke till four or five in the morning, pass out, wake up at four in the afternoon and do the same thing. Something I always thought about is, How am I gonna keep the party going?" It was this question that planted the seed for HUF.

"When you go 10 years deep into skateboarding, you realize at some point that you can't do this forever," Hufnagel says. "I can skateboard forever, but I can't travel the world and be at a professional level forever." He pauses. "I think you just want change too."

And so Hufnagel began to think about change. In his travels he'd been exposed to the street culture in Japan and Europe. Sneaker collecting was becoming a big deal the world over. And Hufnagel was into all of it — the sneakers, the street art and, most of all, the clothing. He wore pieces from Supreme, Japanese brand Mad Hectic and Stüssy, which sponsored him. Off the board he wore limited- edition Nike Air Maxes. "People were just trading and finding out where things were," he says. "This culture was really brewing."

He wouldn't say it himself, but Huf nagel has always been



Skateboarding is about freedom, adrenaline, creativity.

defined by his style. He stood out as a skateboarder because of his powerful, fast and graceful physicality. To a lesser extent, he was known for his aesthetics. "He just dressed kind of fresh," former HUF creative director Hanni El Khatib says. "When people think of him as a skateboarder, they definitely think of his style." Hufnagel was so into clothing that in the late 1990s he did a six-month stint at the Fashion Institute of Technology, taking classes in design and pattern making.

And so HUF was born in a narrow side room in Hufnagel's apartment in San Francisco. At the time, Hufnagel was at the height of his skateboarding career, still riding for Real and landing ollies higher than heaven. He and Freeman opened the first HUF store on Sutter Street as a sort of marketplace for all the things he'd discovered and coveted on his travels. They mainly carried sneakers, and because of Hufnagel's connections they often had the rarest limited-edition Nikes. They also offered clothing from Supreme, P.A.M., Stüssy and Mad Hectic, as well as skate decks and KAWS figurines. And from day one, they made their own T-shirts, with big HUF logos on them.

T-shirts led to an entire line of clothing that was immediately popular with industry tastemakers. But it was their Plantlife socks — athletic socks with an all-over pot-leaf print, designed by El Khatib — that reached a broader audience. They were created half jokingly as a conversation starter to get girls at parties. (Hufnagel doesn't really smoke weed.) But they took off after members of the rap group Odd Future, who frequented the brand's first L.A. store, started wearing them; the socks became one of the best-selling items in HUF history.

Artist collaborations were an early and enduring part of the brand. Barry McGee, Cleon Peterson, Chloé Kovska and other artists have all done their first clothing designs with HUF. I ask Kovska what HUF offered that interested her. "The freedom to breathe," she replies. "They didn't have a problem with risqué imagery, weed or nudity. I could just be myself with them. Nothing was a bad idea."

HUF's aesthetic crystallized early on. Ultimately, it's rooted in the founder himself: his history, his tastes, his reputation — and his undying love of skateboarding. HUF is not a core skate brand, but it's not purely a streetwear brand either. Skateboarding anchors it. Hufnagel wants HUF to have a skate team no matter what. He wants skaters to wear HUF clothes. "Our roots come from skateboarding, so we're always going to support skateboarding, one way or another," he says. "We're going to have a team, we're going to do tours, we're going to put people in the clothes, we're going to embrace who they are and help them excel in skateboarding."

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In the past 17 years, HUF has gone from a company with a few Tshirt designs to a globally recognized streetwear brand. There are 13 HUF stores, and the company's signature wares are carried in 59 countries. After a 2018 womenswear soft launch, there are plans to widely release the line to reflect the significant presence of women in the sport. Although HUF's growth has included several sets of outside investors (it's currently majority owned by Japanese company TSI Holdings, which is also the parent company of Lakai), Hufnagel has stayed on in varying capacities the entire time. His current title is chief creative officer, and he goes to the office every day.

With the sport of skateboarding changing so much in the past two decades, has Hufnagel ever struggled to stay true to his roots? No, he says, because he doesn't think the skateboarding mind-set ever truly changed. "We don't care what people think," he says. "We're gonna do this because we love it. It creates a culture. The kids involved in it are fresh; they're creating new fashion styles. Kids who are skateboarders are walking down runways for Louis Vuitton. That's pretty fucking amazing."

At first I thought Hufnagel's main motivation was to protect his legacy — the Louis Vuitton–ification of his name. But by all accounts, he has little ego. The more I talk to him, the clearer it becomes that what really keeps him showing up day after day is something else entirely. It's to protect, to be the caretaker of the skateboarding ethos. He doesn't view this as an obligation but as a privilege. Skateboarding gave him friends; it gave him a career, the opportunity to travel, a purpose, a name. "Now I'm in the business of apparel and watching skateboarders grow," he says. "I've continued the same path, but I've just changed positions. I never had to leave skateboarding."

At the age of 45, Hufnagel may not be drinking beers till four A.M. or landing huge tricks, but he's definitely still at the party. He still skateboards every day. "I'm not throwing myself down stairs, but I still have fun going out and just basically skating three blocks and getting a coffee," he says. Is it still as much fun as it was when he was a teenager? He nods. "It's freedom. Freedom to roll fast, to get around easy. I mean, you can grab a fucking Bird scooter and do that, but you may not look that cool." ■

THE PLAYBOY
SYMPOSIUM

BY **MATT MCGORRY**

Growing up, I didn't think much about my gender and the effect it had on my life. How things have changed: As I sit here writing this just after turning 33, I'm able to look back and see the many ways who I am has been shaped by what was expected of me, as a boy and then as a man. A lifetime of striving to fit into society's expectations of manhood had stripped me of so much of my humanity that I couldn't even recognize it at the time. I signed a bad contract. And now I'm lighting that shit on fire.

Until five years ago, I'd never read the fine print of this contract. I signed it, like most of us do, without considering the negative impact of everything deemed "just the way things are." Unfortunately, people following patterns they see as the norm have been the cause of many of the world's greatest injustices. Going with the flow can grant us power and social standing, but at what cost to ourselves and others?

It didn't take long for me to realize that having 17.5-inch arms and an almost 600-pound dead lift caused people to look at me in a way that made me feel powerful — not just physically but socially as well. In a culture that teaches men to be dominant, I found myself building a body and a persona that would demand respect by being "better" than others. I did this often at the expense of my humanity and integrity. For all the time many of us men spend trying to be "good enough" or "better than," when was the last time we saw a man apply the same effort to becoming more honest and compassionate? At the root of these extraordinary human qualities is the ability to be vulnerable, a quality too often seen as weak and "unmanly," something most of us are taught to avoid at all costs. Going against the grain can be costly, but not nearly as costly as slowly bludgeoning our own humanity into submission.

We all know the rules in the bold-type section of the male contract. I, like many of you, had learned them so well that they just felt natural. Being respectful of women doesn't necessarily give us the same social power as hooking up as often as possible and then feeling the affirmation of the head nods we get when telling other guys about it. Like most boys, I was taught we should get as far as girls would let us. I was taught our worth depended on our ability to deliver. Not knowing about sex, not being confident about it and not wanting it were never options. And so, in making our sexual relationships a determinant of our social value, we learned to dehumanize women to fulfill what was expected of us. Many of us lied to our friends about getting to third base, boasted about whom we'd hooked up with and never actually asked for permission to go further. We didn't ask because we didn't want to be seen as unsure, or perhaps because we didn't know or didn't care how hard it is for most women to have to say no. Our expectations of women and our own drive to "conquer" led us to give them the culturally recognizable labels of "tease" and "prude" when they didn't do what we wanted. And then we would shame them by calling them "sluts" and "hos" for doing the same things boys and men did — things that made us "players" and "pimps."

Once I began to recognize the double standards of sexism, I entered the fight for gender equity, thinking I was doing it for women. I soon realized I was doing it for myself and other men. The roles we're expected to play based on our gender are damaging to everyone. Patriarchy is a social system of male domination that harms women and those who identify as gender nonconforming. But it also hurts men: It forces our allegiance to a system that will never allow us to be truly free, that insists we remain dominant and in control. The contract requires that we cut off and numb integral parts of ourselves so we're incapable of fully knowing and expressing our emotions, or of being whole. How can we have integrity and be true to our values if we're expected to uphold our end of this oppressive bargain?

I've succeeded in many of the ways men in our culture are taught to aspire to. I've had success in my career as an actor, earning fame and a decent paycheck. I was a nationally ranked powerlifter. And yet I was left with profound insecurity and a sense of emptiness. How could it be any other way when my selfworth relied on having to prove myself over and over again?

Mutual liberation was the antidote to my despair. I wholeheartedly believe that when we're our best selves, we fight for what is right even when we know we'll get pushback. Courage and integrity require this of us. I have gone through a reorientation of my heart and soul, and I know that the work of growing to understand myself better, and to effect positive change, will never be complete. Reclaiming my humanity is dependent on resisting societal pressures that tell me to conform to the status quo, that tell me to be silent about injustice and to normalize oppression, hate and even my own deep-seated biases.

Take a moment to picture the "all-American man." If you're like most people, you visualize someone who looks like me: a straight, white, cisgender man with a "strong build." Over time, I learned how this default image had impacted my life and given me false confidence in my ability to be objective. If, while growing up, I never had to think much about what it meant to be a man, I certainly didn't think much about what it meant to be white. When we're in the dominant group, we rarely have to examine how our identities impact our survival, the way LGBTQ people, women, people of color, poor people and disabled people do.

In order for us to stand a chance at claiming our full humanity and embodying an expansive and inclusive worldview, we must be willing to go out of our way. We've grown up in a culture that teaches us to devalue the perspectives of the most marginalized. I did this for most of my life without even realizing it. But if we're ever to create a world where everyone is truly valued, safe and free, we must learn to listen to the voices from the farthest margins. We must assume the same, if not higher, levels of competency and objectivity in those who don't fit the image of the "all-American man."

It is my honor to bring in four leaders whose voices, perspectives and brilliance need to be heard. By listening, with open hearts and open minds, we will grow to better understand others, the world we live in and, ultimately, ourselves.

In the words of one of my sheroes, Angela Davis, "I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept."

Matt McGorry is an activist and actor known for roles on Orange Is the New Black and How to Get Away With Murder.

A FAT BLACK POLITICS OF DESIRE

BY **SONYA RENEE TAYLOR**

When the Australian reporter called to ask me my thoughts on the article and photos in PLAYBOY featuring pop singer Lizzo, I promptly put the journalist on hold and googled the pics. I love Lizzo, but the thought of perusing a PLAYBOY magazine had not occurred to me since 1991, when I "found" a decade's worth of old issues stacked in my uncle's dresser drawers like bars of gold. Snooping through his things when he lived in our basement was a regular activity of mine, particularly because he had so much porn. Thumbing through those pages, I learned everything and nothing about my own sexuality, my own desirability.

Desire, according to my uncle's magazines, was blonde, cleanshaven, thin and white. Desire was red lips and a pouting mouth, and desire appeared to always be posing suggestively… with fruit. Uncle had other magazines. They were explicit and crass: black girls with pendulous breasts squirting milk or sprawling spreadeagle with their fingers rambling through thick black pubic hair. Every running joke I'd ever heard about PLAYBOY seemed to focus on how people read it "for the articles," an allusion to the supposedly more sophisticated palate the magazine was said to cater to. Erudite people read PLABYOY.

The fat black woman's body has always been a marvel—even when the world found it grotesque, it found it spectacular.

Those tasteful people (read: men) didn't want smut; they wanted beauty and class. They wanted thin, white, clean-shaven visions of desire. If the women in PLAYBOY were classy and beautiful, by default the women in the other magazines, the women with skin and hair like mine, must be smut. Dark girls were carnal but not desired. They were indeed objects of lust but not of beauty. If what I deduced about desire and beauty from these magazines was true, then what would I, could I, be as a sexual being in this body?

The fat black woman's body has always been a marvel — even when the world found it grotesque, it found it spectacular. When Sarah "Saartjie" Baartman was abducted and enslaved by European colonizers to be exhibited naked in a cage beside a baby rhinoceros, it was the epic swell of her butt and thighs, her pronounced labia and deep brown complexion that induced white folks to pay their money to gawk at her. This is what fat black girls like me came to expect for our bodies. I knew men might watch my ass sway beneath a sundress when I walked to the corner store in July. Men would spit their hunger toward me, spectators graciously detailing the myriad ways they would consume this prey set in motion before them. Of course it was my duty to appreciate that someone might want to devour me, that someone might want this undesirable body.

Not until I saw myself reflected in the brilliant tapestry of other black women — women I desired — did I begin to see desire and beauty as possible in my own being. But those women were not in magazine spreads. They were in kitchens in Oakland and Baltimore. I met them in mediation circles and at marches. Black women pouring into the streets to protest the murders of unarmed black bodies — it was in these sacred spaces that I saw how we are lovers and healers, desired and wholly beautiful. It was black women who told me I was a being of magnificence and sumptuous delight, and it wasn't until I began believing them that I was truly liberated into the fullness of a sexuality formed of my own definitions. Lizzo is gorgeous in her spread, but she is we — fat black girls have always been worthy of desire and respect, and we never needed a magazine to tell us that.

Sonya Renee Taylor is founder of the Body Is Not an Apology movement and author of The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love.

ON NONTOXIC MASCULINITY

BY **RICHIE RESEDA**

By the time most of us are 12, we've punched someone for pride, lied about sex for cool cred and called another boy "gay" for not being "man enough." This is what toxic masculinity teaches us — that we're measured by our physical prowess, by how much money we make and how many womxn we "have." (Womxn is a spelling many feminists use instead of women, to recognize the independence of womxn from men.) But what do we do when we're ready to ditch these chains?

Consent doesn't start in the bedroom — it starts with the first glance. Feeling attracted to someone doesn't entitle me to stare, linger or look them up and down. Contrary to what music videos and middle school taught me, it's not sexy — it's creepy. Just like it's not okay to express sexuality with my body to people who aren't down, it's not okay to express it with my face either.

The same goes for my mouth. Toxic masculinity dictates that I verbally express sexualized appraisal at all times, that these are "compliments." But they're not. Rather than assume people want to talk at all, I've found it's best to ask for permission and start with regular conversation. "Hi, can I talk to you?" works great. And if they say no, well, that means no.

I sometimes struggle with the idea that my manhood, and therefore my value, doesn't originate in my wallet. I drive a 1992 Acura Integra that looks like it once decorated a telephone pole. It gets me where I need to go without problems, but I feel embarrassed.

The toxic devil on my shoulder tells me that I should be in a Model S, that driving a more expensive car would make me bigger, more powerful, more "manly." To escape this mythology, I remember that I'm not valued by what I make but by what I give. Driving a sensible car gives me the freedom to support friends and family financially when need be, and to donate to causes I believe in. This reminds me that my purpose is to help, not to ball out.

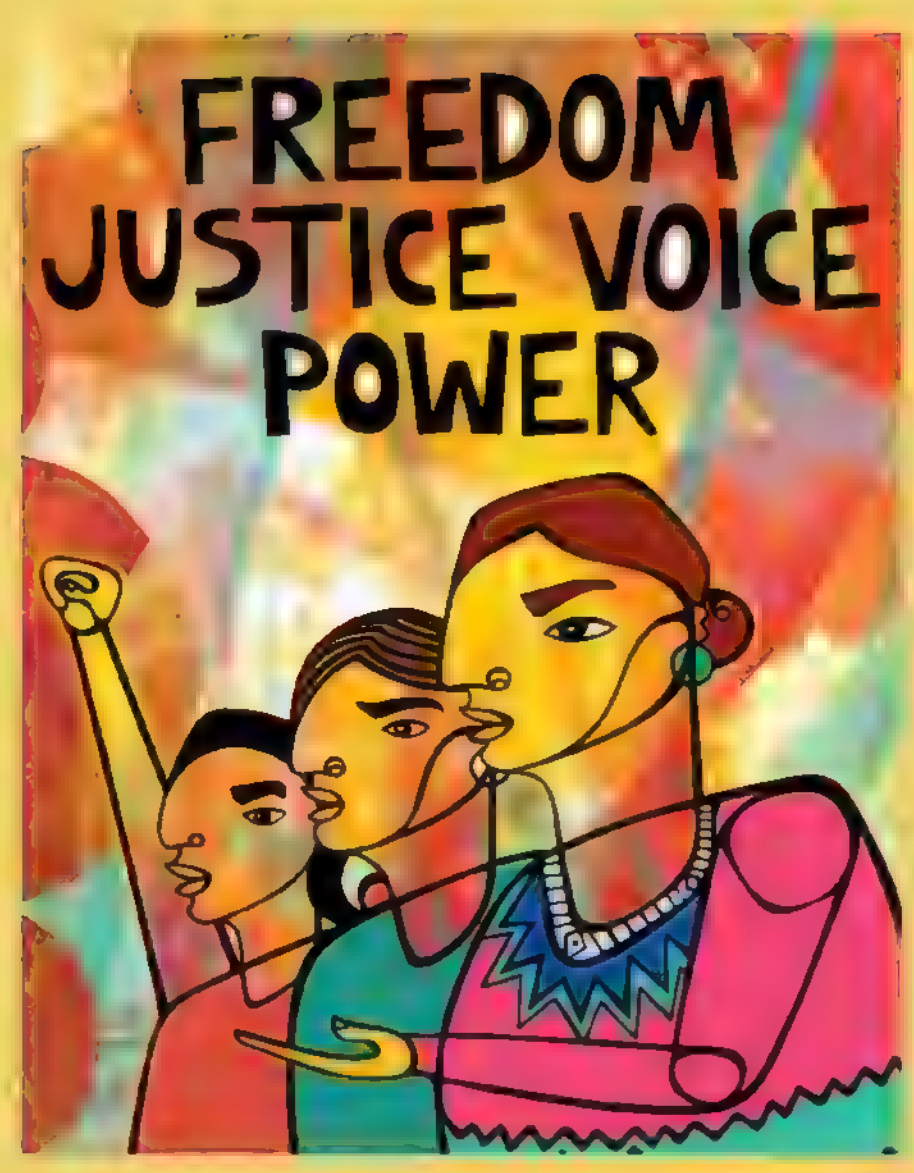
Getting man points for physically dominating others with athleticism or violence is another tough one to shake. It's insidious, because I know choosing not to play this domination game can get me hurt, or at least ridiculed with insults that liken me to "weak" people like womxn and queer folks.

Combating this takes courage, dedication and tolerance for discomfort. When someone "disrespects" me or the people I'm with, I must have the confidence to resist the urge to bark back, get revenge or "come out on top." I instead seek resolution and prioritize safety. This doesn't guarantee I'll be safe, but neither does violence.

Today, this is revolutionary — to pursue solutions instead of domination. But it's vital. Violence escalates when I fight fire with fire rather than with water. Fighting with water doesn't mean allowing myself to be victimized; it means the opposite. The nontoxic way to deal with conflict is to solve problems rather than to "prove myself."

This is why toxic masculinity is easy. It means going with the flow and being cool with it when the river cascades off a mountain. Nontoxic masculinity is hard. It means swimming upstream…but it beats falling off a cliff.

Richie Reseda is a formerly incarcerated feminist, organizer and producer of Indigo Mateo's 2019 album, Intuition.



ON PRIVILEGE AND FREEDOM

BY **MUNROE BERGDORF**

We are living in a time of social recalibration. Our understanding of oppressive structures has never been as widely acknowledged, discussed or deconstructed within the mainstream as it is today. The language we use for this is expanding, thanks to decades of thought put to paper, largely by womxn, people of color and the LGBTQ community, about what it means to be seen as "less than" by those who hold social power.

Discussions surrounding race, gender identity, sexual orientation and other factors have helped us identify which crosssections of society are most likely to be placed at a social disadvantage. These conversations have benefited greatly from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading American scholar of critical race theory who coined the term *intersectionality* in the late 1980s; today, intersectional feminism recognizes the political and social disparities that impact our identities. The experience of an upper-class, white, cisgender, heterosexual woman will differ from that of a working-class, black, transgender, queer woman. And in understanding that difference in experience, we can understand and pinpoint systems of oppression such as racism, transphobia and sexism in a more nuanced way.

It wasn't until I discovered Crenshaw's work that I felt truly close to feminism — I found so much of the feminist theory I had been exposed to either dismissive of womxn who hadn't been assigned female at birth, or focused primarily on the needs and experiences of Western white womxn. I craved a branch of feminism that took into consideration the fact that womxn don't come in one form. We all have different stories, different struggles and different lessons to teach one another, so it's vital that the womxn's liberation movement reflect that.

Intersectional feminism allows us to see who holds power within society through the lens of privilege — a word often used in discussions of social justice today. Privilege is the recognition that some of us are afforded a head start by virtue of our identity. Privilege doesn't mean your life has been easy; it just means it would have been harder had you also been born X. It's important to recognize that privilege isn't fixed, just as our identities aren't fixed — we change as human beings throughout our lives, and so may our social privilege.

With all this language being adopted into the mainstream consciousness, it's important to note that this expanded terminology isn't necessarily new. It originated largely from conversations that have been going on within marginalized communities for a long time. The fact that you may not have heard them until now is due largely to the historic lack of diverse voices within the mainstream, and limited discussion of racism and prejudice in a real, nuanced way from the perspective of those who experience them. Terms such as *mansplaining, cultural appropriation, white guilt, hetero normativity* and *cisgender* help us disestablish certain behaviors and identities as "normal," thus allowing those who are marginalized not to be seen as "other." Being straight and cisgender may be common, but common isn't the same as normal. There's power in the language we choose, and there's freedom in our willingness to understand how it affects others who don't have what we have.

It would have been hard to imagine even 10 years ago the conversations we're now having about our different experiences in society. Maybe we got too comfortable within the boundaries of our privilege, or numb within our oppression. But if we've learned anything since the start of the #MeToo movement, it's that we must never be complacent, because those who would wind back our freedom of choice, expression and identity are anything but. We must stay active, we must stay vocal, we must stay informed. In the quest for equality, we must be conscious of what we're striving to be equal with and certain that we don't repeat the oppressive behavior of some privileged communities. Freedom must come from reconfiguring society in a way that's inclusive and not reliant on the exploitation, suppression or ostracism of any societal cross-sections. Freedom has to be a consistent and sustainable goal — freedom for all, not just power for some.

Munroe Bergdorf is a London-based activist and model.

ILLUSTRATION BY **JOEY GUIDONE**

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

FIGHTING TO BE SEEN CAN MEAN CONTENDING WITH BEING MISHEARD. FORTY YEARS AFTER AN UNPRECEDENTED *PLAYBOY INTERVIEW*, **THOMAS PAGE MCBEE** EXAMINES DESTRUCTIVE TRANS NARRATIVES AND FLAWED FRAMEWORKS

In 1979, famed composer Wendy Carlos came out as trans in the pages of this magazine. This was no small thing. By the time she sat down with journalist Arthur Bell for the Playboy Interview, Carlos had won three Grammy Awards for her 1968 synthesized take on Bach and scored Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. PLAYBOY's nearly 14,000-word piece—billed as "a candid conversation with the *Switched-On Bach* composer who, for the first time, reveals her sex-change operation and her secret life as a woman"— elicited sympathetic letters from readers and was arguably groundbreaking.

It was, after all, one of the few pieces of original journalism about trans people in the mainstream media in the late 1970s. Yet a rereading reveals troubling ways in which gatekeepers, ostensibly charged with faithfully presenting our emergent stories, failed. It is also a reminder that the human cost of that failure, all these decades later, is part of every trans person's story, including my own.

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If Americans had heard of a trans person at all at the time of the Carlos interview, it was probably Renée Richards, who in 1976 and 1977 had fought to continue playing tennis after her transition, generating a major controversy in women's sports. For refusing to abandon her desire to play professionally, Richards was called an "extraordinary spectacle" in *Sports Illustrated*, shortly before a 1977 New York Supreme Court ruling confirmed her right to compete "as female."

Erasure — ignoring or dismissing trans people and their contributions—is why most people today, when they think of the pivotal 1969 Stonewall riots, don't remember the many trans women of color who were on the front lines. Erasure was the primary weapon used against trans people 40 years ago, and when it didn't work, dehumanization became the norm. Despite existing across cultures and millennia, trans people, the new cultural narrative went, threatened the "natural" order of things. Two years after the Richards ruling, Carlos, who'd made the occasional public appearance as "Walter" despite having completed her medical transition in 1972, was understandably wary about making her trans status public in a landscape that was hostile and othering that is, dehumanizing through marginalization — in its treatment of trans women. (Trans men then, as now, didn't much figure into the cultural imagination.)

The misguided idea that physical differences are manifestations of something sinister was, it seemed, back in vogue. Such superstitions, dominant in the medieval era, had largely been put to bed once Freud came along and demonstrated that it was the mind, not the body, that held the key to a person's behavior. But journalists, film directors and authors, newly eager to tell trans stories and unconcerned with the well- being of their subjects, found an enduring language in monstrosity. Bell, in fact, sums up Carlos's story with an allusion to the classic monster tale The *Phantom of the Opera*. "[She] became a phantom figure, living in [her] own version of the opera house," the introduction to the interview announces — right after comparing her personal life to "a drama that could easily have been written into *Clockwork*'s surrealistic scenario." Bell casts Carlos as not-human, a monster occupying a nightmarish world of her own making, rather than laying the blame for that nightmare squarely at the feet of the culture that had shamed Carlos into hiding in the first place. His framework demonstrates this violent "othering" in action.

But there's a lot to learn from Carlos's graceful and humane responses to the often anthropological and ill-informed questions. (At one point, Bell asks her to describe her bottom surgery in gnarly medical detail. She does so reluctantly and "utterly without emotion" — a reasonable response to the likely humiliating task of describing the most intimate part of her body not only to a stranger but to a huge, unknown audience of readers.) All these years later, it's painful to read her insistence on herself in the empathy vortex of the interview. In a direct dig that Bell seems not to notice, she says, "Being a transsexual makes me a barometer of other people's own comfort with themselves. Those who aren't sexually at peace with themselves tend to be the most uptight around me." At one point, he asks if she had "any idea" what would have happened if she'd not transitioned. "Yes," she responds, with a frustration I'd wager almost any trans person can relate to, "I'd be dead."

• • •

It's a funny thing to trace one's own winding story with this cultural rubble, this debris from the wrecking ball of history, in mind. Despite the recent ground gained in representation, mainstream American culture has generally reacted to trans

bodies in a way that has been disastrous for those of us who live in them: We face some of the highest murder and suicide rates of any population in America.

As a trans author and journalist, I've spent the past decade or so holding my nose and digging into our history in an attempt to understand where I learned there was something wrong with being who I am. That shame, which took me years to overcome, delayed my transition into adulthood and nearly killed me. And without fail, I've located it in the framing of our stories — the othering that is the hallmark of the many movies, articles and books that defined the trans experience with little to no input from actual trans people. It may be hard to remember in the era of Pose and Orange Is the New Black, but until recently, when we showed up in the American imagination we were either tragic victims (*Boys Don't Cry*), villainous shape-shifters (*The Crying Game*) or straight-up villains (*The Silence of the Lambs*).

As for Carlos, I wasn't able to speak with her for this story. A representative directed me to her website, which gives "PLAYBOY magazine editors" a negative rating on her short list of "people and publications who have betrayed a cruel indifference to anyone's interests but their own."

I know what it's like to risk this cruelty for the small but sacred reward of continuing to live another day. And I see a truth about the dark heart of humanity, even if I refuse to make anyone a monster: Despite the courageous visibility of Carlos, Richards and many other trans women and men who made the decision to live with heroic openness at the end of the 20th century, the people tasked with telling their stories often failed at their jobs. In some cases, they're still failing.

The good news is that the rise in digital and social media has vastly expanded opportunities for trans people to tell our own stories and to change the conversation—away from limiting and dehumanizing scripts about genitals and surgeries and toward bigger and broader questions: What is gender anyway? How does it define how we see the world and how the world sees us? What is a "real" man or woman, and who taught us to think of ourselves that way? How does race complicate gender identity? What about class?

These are questions for every body — and I believe that our shared humanity makes gender a rich framework in which to explore culture, trans or not. The shame of journalism past is rooted, almost always, in the inability of reporters to see their own biases. Given that, journalists who speak to trans subjects may want to look in the mirror first for some personal reflection. For my part, it took 30 years before I saw myself in my reflection.

Can you imagine? ■

Composer and electronic-music pioneer Wendy Carlos in her New York City studio, October 1979. In addition to recording the Grammy-winning album Switched-On Bach, the first all-synthesizer classical music release, Carlos composed the scores for movies including A Clockwork Orange, The Shining and Tron. Her May 1979 Playboy Interview is available to read on our digital archive, iPlayboy.com.

A GALA FOR THE AGES

WELCOME TO OUR 65TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY

The luminaries attending this imaginary scene all touched, each in their own indelible way, Playboy and its evolution—from penning the first Playboy Interview to being the magazine's most famous cover model to helming the company for 20 years. Can you name these cultural heavyweights and American icons? To this coterie of early influencers, we raise a special toast of thanks. Here's to them—and to another 65 years.

ILLUSTRATION BY **SPIROS HALARIS**

WE WON'T GO BACK

FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY, PLAYBOY HAS CHAMPIONED REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY — IN THESE PAGES, IN THE COURTS AND ON THE STREETS

BY **ELIZABETH YUKO**

"It's okay if you think it's not right for women to have abortions — but it's not your problem, because we decide." So said Chelsea Handler in a piece PLAYBOY ran during the whiteknuckle summer of 2016. Entitled *My Choice*, Handler's story includes characteristically blunt reflections on her personal experience with abortion and makes a case for the durability of *Roe v. Wade*. "Once you go forward in history," she wrote, "you don't go backward."

But backward may be exactly the direction reproductive rights in the United States are now headed. With the emergence of at least 14 state-level abortion cases that could, if they find their way to the newly right-leaning Supreme Court, result in the toppling of *Roe v. Wade*, it's time for the pro-choice movement to regroup. Toward that end, we offer this brief history of reproductive rights through the lens of PLAYBOY.

• • •

America in the 1960s was, by and large, not a safe place for a woman to terminate a pregnancy. In most states, abortion was illegal (with exceptions for cases such as fetal anomaly, extreme natal complication and some instances of rape and incest). Those seeking the procedure had to resort to whatever care they could get, which ranged from sympathetic doctors operating illegally to unqualified individuals performing abortions without training, sterile conditions or necessary resources. In 1965, 17 percent of all deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth occurred due to illegal abortions, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Abortion was a public health crisis, and PLAYBOY responded accordingly.

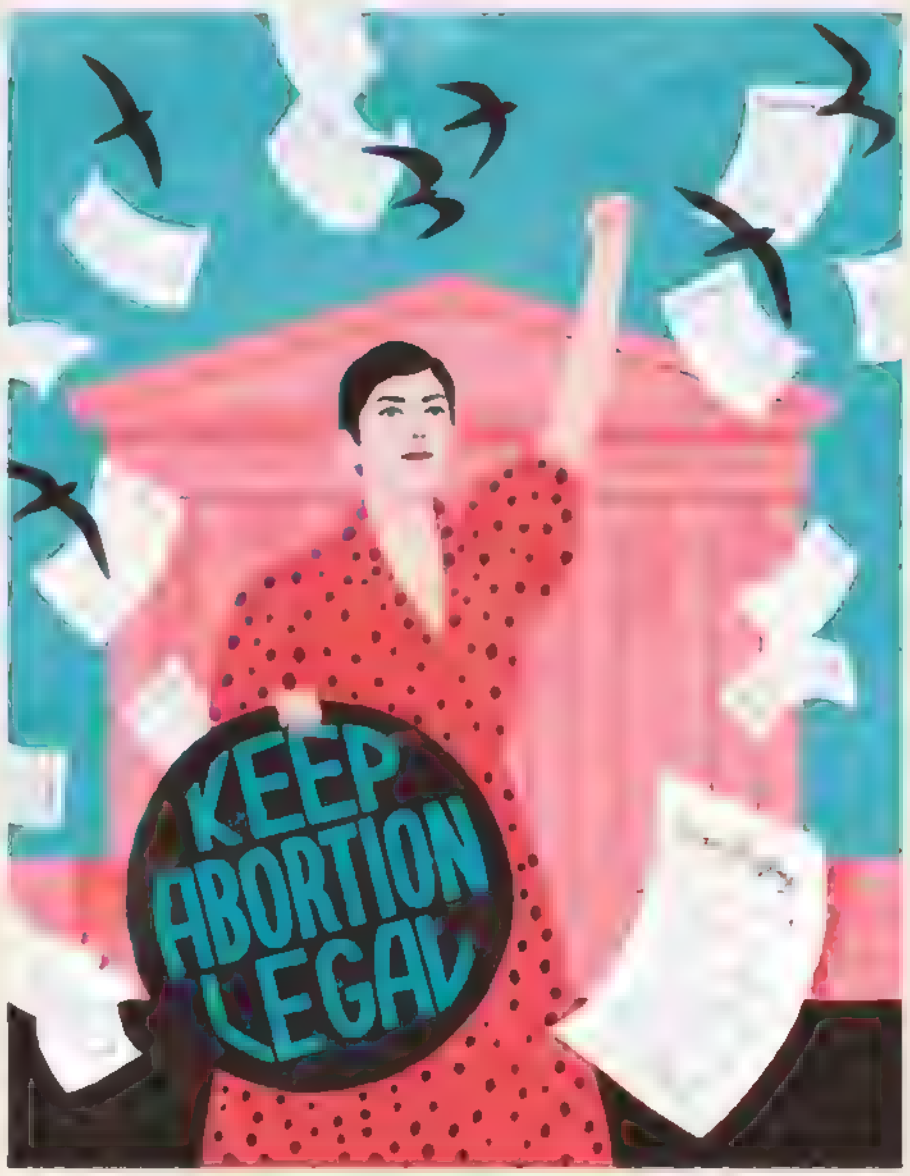
Some of the subject's earliest appearances in the magazine were in Hugh Hefner's *Playboy Philosophy*, peppered throughout his voluminous musings on sex and society. In a January 1964 installment Hefner wrote, "Abortion remains illegal in all states of the Union, although it is undergone by hundreds of thousands of women annually, under circumstances that seriously endanger not only their health and welfare, but their very lives." To combat any misconceptions about who was seeking the procedure, he added that more than half of all illegal abortions were performed on married women. Like it or not, he argued, abortion was a mainstay in married, middle-class American families.

PLAYBOYcemented its position in the December 1965 issue, in a response to an anti-choice letter: "A pregnant woman is faced with choices — and we think she should be allowed to decide which alternative is preferable under the circumstances — whatever the circumstances happen to be." We upped the ante in the May 1967 issue when, speaking in the *Playboy Forum* — a deep-diving letters section in which readers and editors debated issues raised in the *Philosophy* — our editors urged readers to write to their senators and representatives, demanding they support bills to

"liberalize antiquated abortion statutes" in 12 states. Clearly Hef and his colleagues viewed the issue as one of universal urgency.

Perhaps the most meaningful contributions to the conversation came from women, despite the magazine's overwhelmingly male readership at the time. According to a 2017 article by Sierra Tishgart in The Cut, of the more than 350 letters on abortion published in the magazine between 1963 and 1973, approximately one third were written by women. In a world where decisions about women's bodies were made overwhelmingly by men, women used our letters section as a global platform from which to speak their truths.

In addition to our editorial coverage, the Playboy Foundation — the charitable- giving organization that supported groups embodying the Playboy Philosophy — began funding the abortion - rights movement in 1966 by providing a grant to the Association for the Study of Abortion, which offered information and strategy advice for other advocacy groups. This continued with financial support of organizations including the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws and the Women's National Abortion Coalition, as well as those working on a local level in middle-American battlegrounds such as North Dakota, Michigan and Ohio. Playboy also provided funding to the American Civil Liberties Union Women's Rights Project, whose co-founder Ruth Bader Ginsburg co-authored a 1973 letter to the magazine that cited "the Playboy Foundation's generous support" while emphasizing the daunting challenges that remained.



As the idealistic 1960s gave way to the shell-shocked 1970s, the pro-choice movement dug in: Instead of pushing for liberalized abortion laws, it began advocating for their all-out repeal. This was initially addressed here in a 1967 *Forum* letter from Dr. Lonny Myers of Illinois Citizens for the Medical Control of Abortion. Myers argued that even in the wake of partial reform, "there will be no significant improvement in all the tragedies associated with clandestine abortions." But perhaps the most wellknown example of PLAYBOY's advocacy for repealing abortion laws came in the form of *The Abortion Revolution*, a September 1970 article by Dr. Robert Hall that served as an examination of the history of the procedure and a playbook for how a total repeal could be achieved. His predictions of how the repeal would carry the day in the Supreme Court largely came true.

Which brings us to the case that changed it all.

• • •

In July 1970, a 22-year-old Floridian named Shirley Wheeler became the first woman in American history to be convicted of manslaughter for having an abortion. The Playboy Foundation provided grants to the Center for Constitutional Rights to help with Wheeler's defense, as well as to law professor Cyril Means, who filed a brief on her behalf on constitutional issues involved in the case. Ultimately, the Florida Supreme Court overturned her conviction. And an important bond was formed: The foundation later provided Means with the funds to file an amicus curiae brief in support of the Texas court case that eventually led to *Roe v. Wade*.

The right to privacy was the basis for this landmark case. The plaintiff, then known only as Jane Roe, was a single woman from Texas who wanted to end her pregnancy in one of the many states that permitted abortion only when the woman's life was in danger. In a 7-2 decision, handed down in January 1973, the Supreme Court ruled that the constitutional right to privacy "is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." Most of the existing state laws on abortion were rendered unconstitutional.

With that victory, PLAYBOY's abortion coverage ebbed over the next three decades —with the notable exception of indepth coverage of antiabortion terrorism in the 1990s. But a creeping post-Obama conservatism, plus increasing challenges to abortion on state and federal levels, meant a new wave of engagement. Handler's 2016 piece broke the news that the author had chosen to have not one but two abortions at the age of 16 — a revelation that went viral and demonstrated the issue's continuing volatility. Two years later, on the other side of Donald Trump's ascension to the White House, then outgoing president of Planned Parenthood Cecile Richards sat for the *Playboy Interview*. The tenor of that May/June 2018 installment echoed that of our coverage from the 1960s and early 1970s. Richards stressed the need for everyone, men included, to stay vigilant in the fight for reproductive rights — a battle cry that became even more urgent with the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in the fall of last year.

"If we believe in progress and in taking away barriers," Richards said, "there's always going to be a next fight." ■

ILLUSTRATION BY **MONICA GARWOOD**

Taylah Bennett

Taylah Bennett is an Australian model and fitness enthusiast ready to take the world by storm. Beautiful and motivated to achieve the highest degree of happiness and success, we sat down with the bubbly model to find out how it all started and her journey to this point.

Taylah We're happy to have you on the cover of Playboy! Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? Hello! Thank you so much! I couldn't be happier to be on this month's cover! To be honest, this photoshoot was my first real modelling experience – and what an honourable first experience it was! This shoot was so much fun and a huge highlight for me, so I can't wait to do another shoot again.

Health and fitness are an important part of your life, what are some of the things you love the most about competitive training? Yes, they certainly are! My favourite thing about training is that it is you vs. you. It is an opportunity to push yourself to places you didn't think were possible and practice a huge level of self-discipline. Training is a time to switch off and push yourself to your highest limit.

Can you tell us a bit about your achievements in the fitness industry? Yes! I stepped on stage back in 2019 for a natural bodybuilding competition. This was a huge achievement for me as I proved to myself that I was capable of doing this. I was never sporty or athletic growing up, so it was a huge challenge for me to transform my body and mindset. I went on to become a qualified personal trainer as I wanted to help others to push themselves to their highest potential in a healthy way!

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? It means everything to me! I love being independent and not having to rely on anyone so it is important to me to have a strong mindset and know that I can achieve anything I set my mind to. I always admire self-made women and think it requires a great deal of ambition to go after what you want!

The Outdoors is a great love for you, what are some of your favourite outdoor activities? It is! I am lucky enough to live on the beautiful Gold Coast and obviously love enjoying our beautiful beaches. My favourite part of the day is my morning walk or a sunset stroll.

What does freedom of self-expression mean to you? To me, freedom of self-expression means being able to be your authentic self without fear of judgement or scrutiny. You could express yourself in the way you dress, your hobbies, music, or whatever makes you feel like YOU! I think this is also closely influenced by your circle so you should surround yourself with people that encourage you to express yourself and support you no matter what.

3 things that you can't go a day without. A phone call to my Mum or a friend, some sort of physical activity, and caffeine LOL.

What are some of your favourite places to visit in Australia and why? I grew up on the Central Coast of NSW so I love to go home to visit my Mum and my friends. I also love going on trips to Sydney to enjoy some shopping and some of the amazing restaurants there. The Gold Coast definitely has my heart though as this was always my favourite holiday destination and now, I am lucky enough to call it my home! The lifestyle here is so relaxed and there is always something to do!

Now we're sure you experience a lot of male attention on and offline, any advice you would like to give to men out there who are hoping to catch your eye the right way? My best advice would be to be yourself and down to earth. Sense of humour is a big thing for me so once a guy has made me laugh my heart softens

a little. It also doesn't hurt to be taken out for some yummy food and a cocktail haha.

What is the fastest way to put a smile on your face? Spending time with my loved ones! No matter what mood I'm in, being around my friends always makes me smile.

What makes you feel the sexiest and empowered? Getting glammed up and wearing an outfit that makes you feel your best definitely helps, but you should feel sexy and empowered every day, just being you! This feeling comes from the inside – remind yourself everyday of your power!

Thank you so much for sitting down with us and letting us get to know you! Any last words for our readers out there? Thank you so much for having me! This was such an incredible experience and one I am extremely grateful for. Yes – I never imagined I would be on the cover of Playboy, so this is a reminder that you can achieve anything, as long as you believe in yourself and don't strive to be anyone else, only the best version of you!

THE ULTIMATE MALE

FANTASY

FORTY YEARS AGO, SIX ICONS OF QUEER AMERICA TOOK CENTER STAGE AT THE WORLD'S HETERO MECCA

BY **GERRICK D. KENNEDY**

Inside the packed Great Hall of the Playboy Mansion, atop a stage washed in purple and yellow lights, six sex symbols shimmied and gyrated to a pulsing disco beat. Dressed in skintight costumes that left little to the imagination, they not only danced, they belted out tunes. But these seductive performers weren't Centerfolds — they were the Village People, and they had brought their act to the hottest home in America.

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It was the fall of 1979, and disco had reached its climax. Gloria Gaynor had released the splendid empowerment anthem "I Will Survive" the previous year, and Rod Stewart had the world asking, "Da Ya Think I'm Sexy?" Donna Summer was on top of the charts. Diana Ross, Sister Sledge and Chic were churning out indelible slices of sparkling dance music. And the Village People were at the height of their stardom.

It made sense, then, that when Hugh Hefner decided to throw a roller-disco pajama party on the posh grounds of the Playboy Mansion, the Village People would be tapped as the night's musical guests.

Watching the bash, taped in October 1979 and aired the following month as an ABC prime-time special, feels like taking a madcap trip through a forgotten bit of Playboy history. Guests included a skate-happy James Caan, a tennis-playing Cheryl Tiegs and a smiling Patty Hearst.

Hosted by the dashing Richard Dawson, the event was billed as a "wild all-night party of music, laughter and roller disco." Naturally the camera gravitated toward the bevy of sun-kissed models that descended on the Mansion grounds during the first portion of the show, with long stretches of screen time dedicated to shots of scantily clad women dancing on skates or frolicking in the Grotto. Although the Village People were the main attraction, other entertainers also performed: Chuck Mangione was there to play the flugelhorn, and Wayland Flowers's rowdy puppet Madame delivered unmannerly zingers throughout the program. Video footage of Playmate photo shoots — nothing too revealing for the ABC presentation — was also incorporated into the show.

Jazz, jokes and feminine beauty — standard fare for PLAYBOY. ("When Hef throws a party, he really throws a party," Dawson says in one bit, paying more attention to the bikini-clad models than to the camera.)

But it is the Village People, grinding and slinking alongside Playmates as they perform two songs in the heart of hetero America, who steal the show. Considering the group was created foremost for men who found nirvana in gay clubs and certainly not in the world of Playboy, the irony almost astonishes.

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At the Playboy Mansion, eroticism and escapism coalesced to create an exhilarating fantasy land. Disco music had the power to harness those same forces and achieve exactly the same thing. Hugh Hefner and the Village People didn't target identical audiences, but they both created and catered to male fantasies.

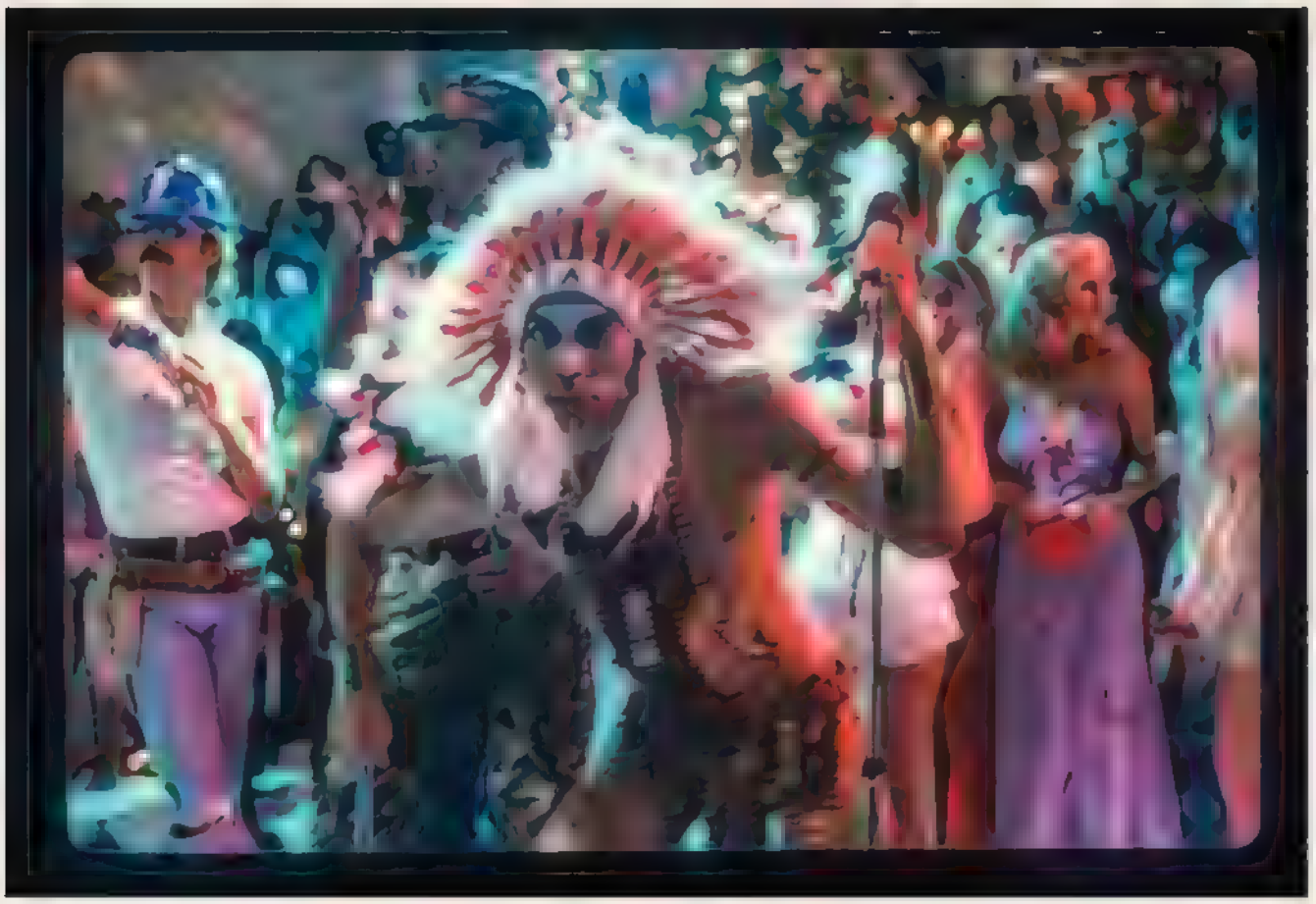
Everything about the Village People, from their image — exaggerated versions of masculine tropes — to the catchy, coded songs they recorded, was crafted through a queer lens. As the group's co-founder and manager Jacques Morali told *Rolling Stone* in 1978 about his motivation for creating the disco act, "Gay people have no [musical group]…nobody to personalize the gay people, you know?"

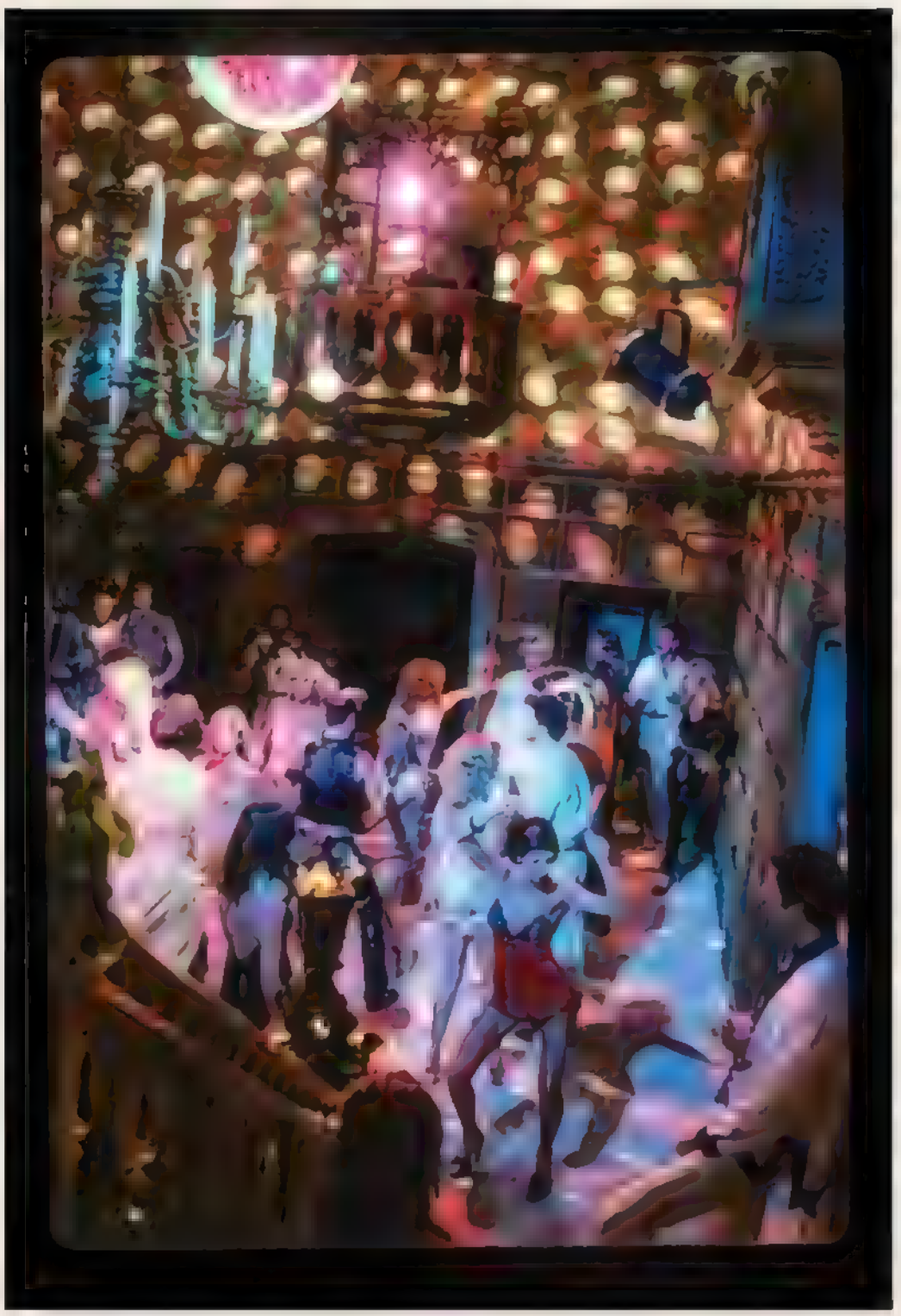
Arriving at the dawn of the 1970s, disco helped define a time of emerging liberation for LGBTQ America. After decades of suppression and erasure, the 1969 Stonewall riots and the gay civil rights movement had ushered in an era of relative openness among queer people. And the slinky, blissful grooves emanating from the disco scene provided a ubiquitous soundtrack at gay clubs across the country — safe havens where men could feel free to explore their sexuality.

As the story goes, it was a gay club in Greenwich Village that sparked the vision for the Village People, a group concept conceived by Morali and his business partner, Henri Belolo. Casablanca Records signed off on the project even before the producers began to recruit members, outside of singer Victor Willis.

Although disco was the rage among gay men, it was a genre dominated by female vocalists. Morali and Belolo, French immigrants looking to cash in on this latest American music craze, shrewdly saw a niche that had yet to be exploited and cobbled together a group to attract a gay male audience. Appropriating straight American masculinity served a dual purpose: Morali knew that strong male images — a cowboy, Native American, cop, soldier (or sailor), construction worker, biker — would titillate gay men and appeal to a broader (straighter) audience unable to decipher the gay innuendoes and double entendres sprinkled throughout the music. Although, as John Rockwell wrote in *The New York Times* in 1979, "those in the know (any five-year-old with a brain) can pick up on their homosexual subtexts."

The Village People's 1977 self-titled debut was so specifically gay, with songs about queer meccas such as San Francisco and





Opening page: *The 1979 Village People lineup — Randy Jones, David Hodo, Glenn Hughes, Victor Willis, Alex Briley and Felipe Rose — as photographed for a* PLAYBOY *article on audio tech* ***Top:*** *Rose performs at the taping of the Playboy Roller Disco and Pajama Party.* ***Above:*** *"Leatherman" character Hughes; one of Wayland Flowers's puppets teased him during the program "You Village People are my kind of people — tacky!"* ***Right:*** *The group gets its groove on dancing with the crowd in the Playboy Mansion's Great Hall*

Fire Island, that member David Hodo (the construction worker) once described it as "possibly the gayest album ever." With their beefcake physiques, accentuated by costumes that displayed their bulging muscles, the Village People toyed with fantasy images to establish themselves as gay sex symbols — even if not every member identified as queer. They presented ideals that gay men could aspire to — the type of men they wanted to be, and the type of men they desired. *The Advocate*, the oldest gay magazine in America, declared the group "a godsend."

By 1979, the Village People were in their prime. The sextet had become a global phenomenon after the campy "Y.M.C.A." exploded on the pop charts, taking the group from a gay clubcircuit staple to an international crossover act in high demand. They toured North America, "Y.M.C.A." went to number one in multiple countries, and a $20 million musical comedy featuring their songs (*Can't Stop the Music*, a Razzie-award-winning flop) was released in June 1980. The Village People had become one of the hottest acts on the planet.

But then the group began to reverse course and rewrite their own narrative. Once open about the performers' sexual identities, by 1980, Morali was downplaying their sexuality.

"Look, the Village People is the only group that is black, white, straight and gay," Morali told PLAYBOY in a 1980 article in which he attempted to distance the group from any queer subtext. "They are successful because they represent many sides of America; because they are fun and sing happy songs," he said. "They are very much gay-influenced.… But they are not a gay group. To say this will kill them!"

To Morali, a gay man, it might have seemed that the group's commercial survival hung in the balance. Instead of pushing the cultural visibility of a marginalized community, he wanted to

HUGH HEFNER AND THE VILLAGE PEOPLE DIDN'T TARGET THE SAME AUDIENCES, BUT BOTH CREATED - AND CATERED TO - MALE FANTASIES.

focus on appealing to the masses. The move was disappointing and startling; after all, the Village People's disco act had broken ground, achieving mainstream success without toning down their queer image — perhaps, in fact, by playing it up. But as their biggest hit, "Y.M.C.A.," ostensibly a paean to gay cruising, was being sung and danced to the world over, the group was pivoting away from fully claiming queerness

The sanitization did not go unnoticed. "In order to get themselves on the Macy's float…and in the hope of getting their image slapped onto kids' lunch boxes, [the Village People] went along with the sexlessness that seems a precondition of gay male representation in pop culture," writes Alice Echols, historian and selfproclaimed "discologist," in her 2010 book *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture.*

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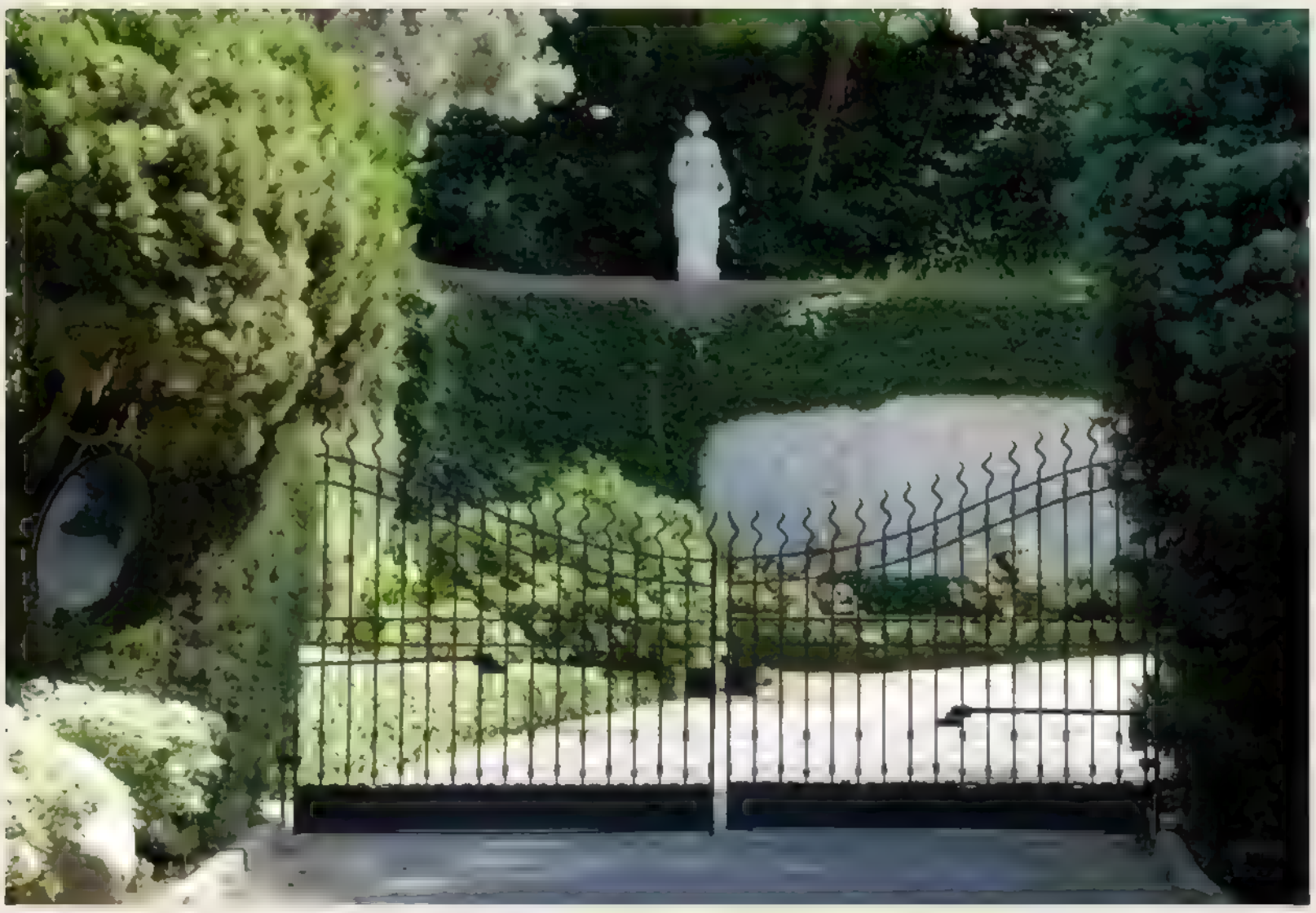
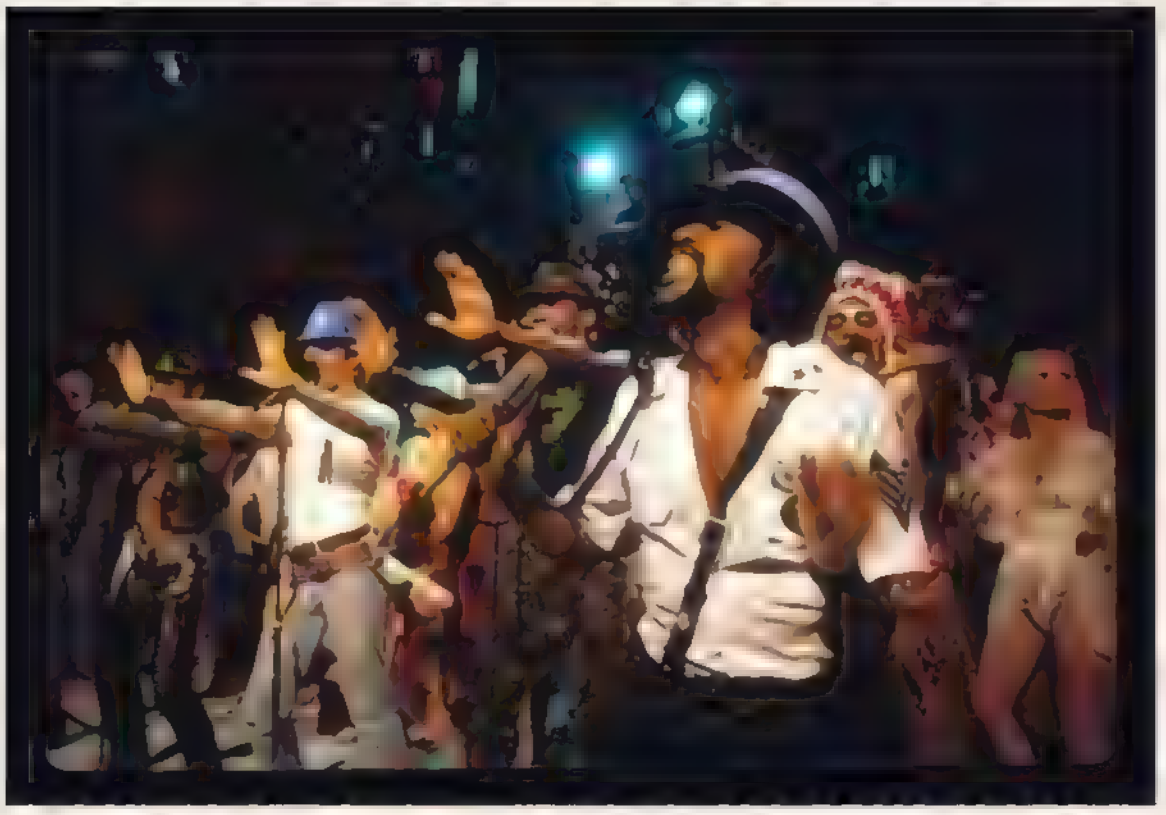
Yet at the Playboy Mansion in 1979, the Village People and their





Top: *The Village People performed two songs for Playboy's Roller Disco and Pajama Party: "Rock and Roll Is Back Again" and "Ready for the '80s," both off their 1979 Live and Sleazy album.* ***Above:*** *Macho men in action at the Mansion.*

disco-fevered audience stood on the brink of monumental shifts that would forever change American culture. The death of disco at the turn of the 1980s gave way to dark years marked by Reaganomics, a devastating war on drugs and an AIDS epidemic that ravaged the same gay Edens the Village People sang about. It would be decades before a new era dawned for queer America: Today, medical advances have largely eradicated HIV's status as a death sentence; gay couples can walk down the aisle and adopt children; trans rights are at the forefront of a national movement. Queer culture has permeated the mainstream, and artists no longer feel the same pressure to stifle their sexuality in order to grow their careers.

Perhaps Morali and the Village People could not have foreseen this moment, one in which equality is closer at hand than ever before — and one in which the group's songs endure, beloved and enshrined in our musical history. But on that night 40 years ago, a leather daddy subversively sang to America about casual gay sex with a wink and a nod toward freedom. And Playboy was happy to host. ■

"If you're a fan of business, I think you're really going to enjoy pleasure."

PUSSY

POWER

Marilyn Minter has been thoughtfully shocking people for 50 years. Here, the legendary artist shares never-be-forepublished work and weighs in on the importance of defining pleasure on one's own terms

BY KIMBERLY DREW

hen I arrive at Marilyn Minter's studio in midtown Manhattan for our interview, I'm reeted with an iced coffee and the artist's favorite chocolate chip cookies. Minter wears a RESIST T-shirt, a d esign c ollaboration with the grassroots political organization Swing Left. "Resist" has become a rallying cry in this political moment; for Minter, a lifelong activist and vocal proponent of reproductive rights, the campaign is just one example of how the multimedia artist uses her practice as activism. (I wore a MY BODY, MY CHOICE shirt from the emerging fashion designer Collina Strada, quietly hoping Minter would think it was cool.) The sartorial choice is a testament to how Minter suffuses every choice she makes with intention — from her outfits to her chic studio layout to the sustainable straw in my compostable coffee cup.

My fascination with Minter's work began when I was in college, when images from Tom Ford's fall-winter 2007 collection popped up on my Tumblr dashboard. I knew very little about Ford and even less about whoever had taken the photos, but I was seduced by their grittiness. In one shot, the designer devours a soft pink cake; in another, a model covered in rain — or sweat — purses her lips as she gently caresses her glasses. Unlike more traditional fashion photographers such as Steven Meisel or Annie Leibovitz, Minter produces images that aren't about the products or the models — they seem to speak directly to the viewer's instinctual desire.

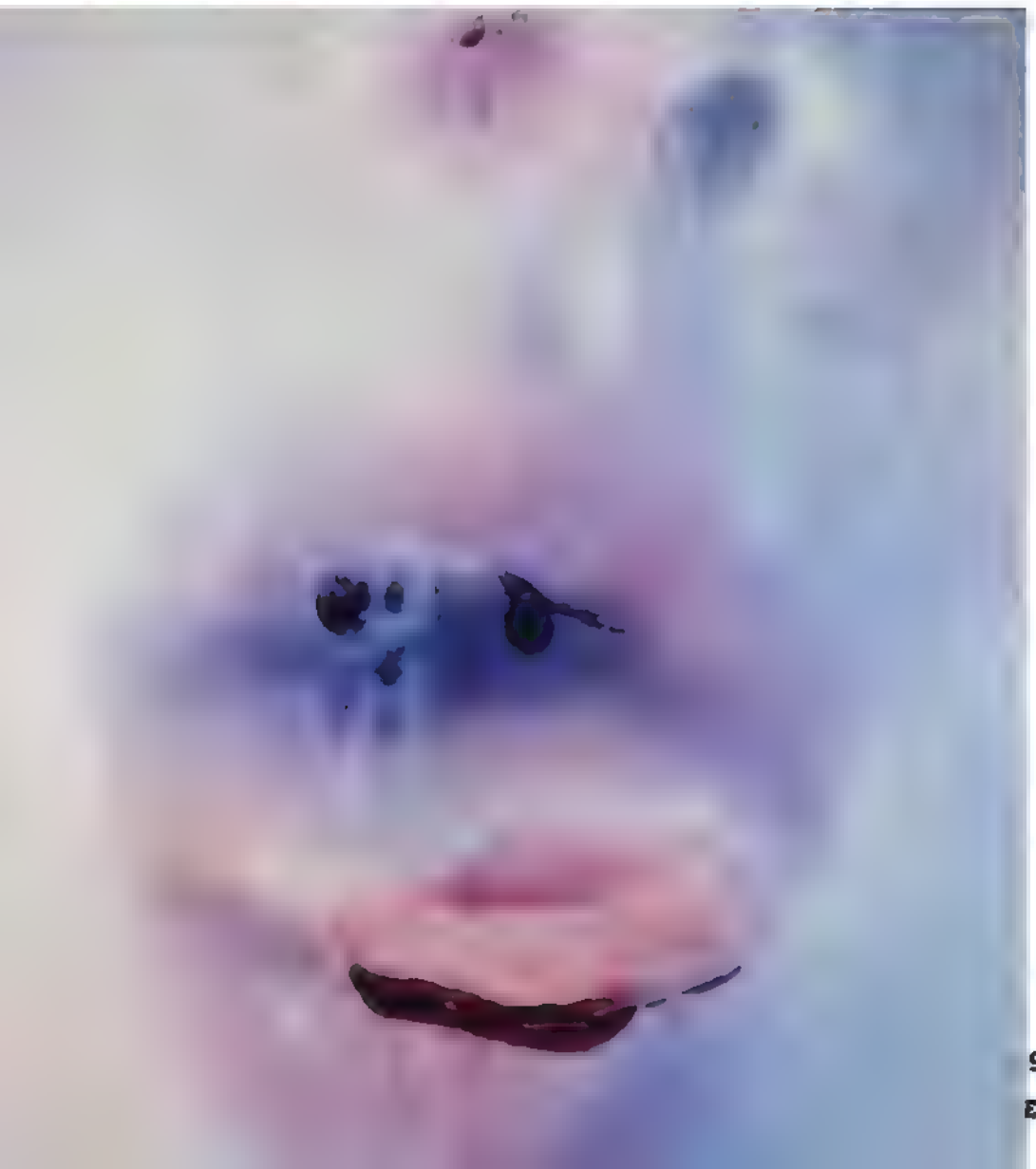
The 71-year-old artist has always explored beauty and pleasure from unexpected vantage points. Born in Shreveport, Louisiana and raised in south Florida, Minter did not spend her early life on a crystal stair. In her 1969 series *Coral Ridge Towers*, shot while she was in college, we get a glimpse of her opioid-addicted mother at home in Fort Lauderdale. "In Florida, we were in the land of no parents," she says of her and her brothers' strained relationship with their mother and father. In the black-and-white images we see their mother, splayed across her bed, applying makeup and taking pleasure in her own gaze. At first glance these images, which won the praise of pioneering photographer Diane Arbus while she was visiting Minter's school, could just as easily be portraits of a retired Hollywood starlet; instead they provide an intimate look into Minter's past. "I knew she'd pass out and never get out of bed and always wear nightgowns and float around," Minter says of her mother. "It was all this kind of bastardized glamour." That glamour would remain a key motif in Minter's practice for the next five decades.

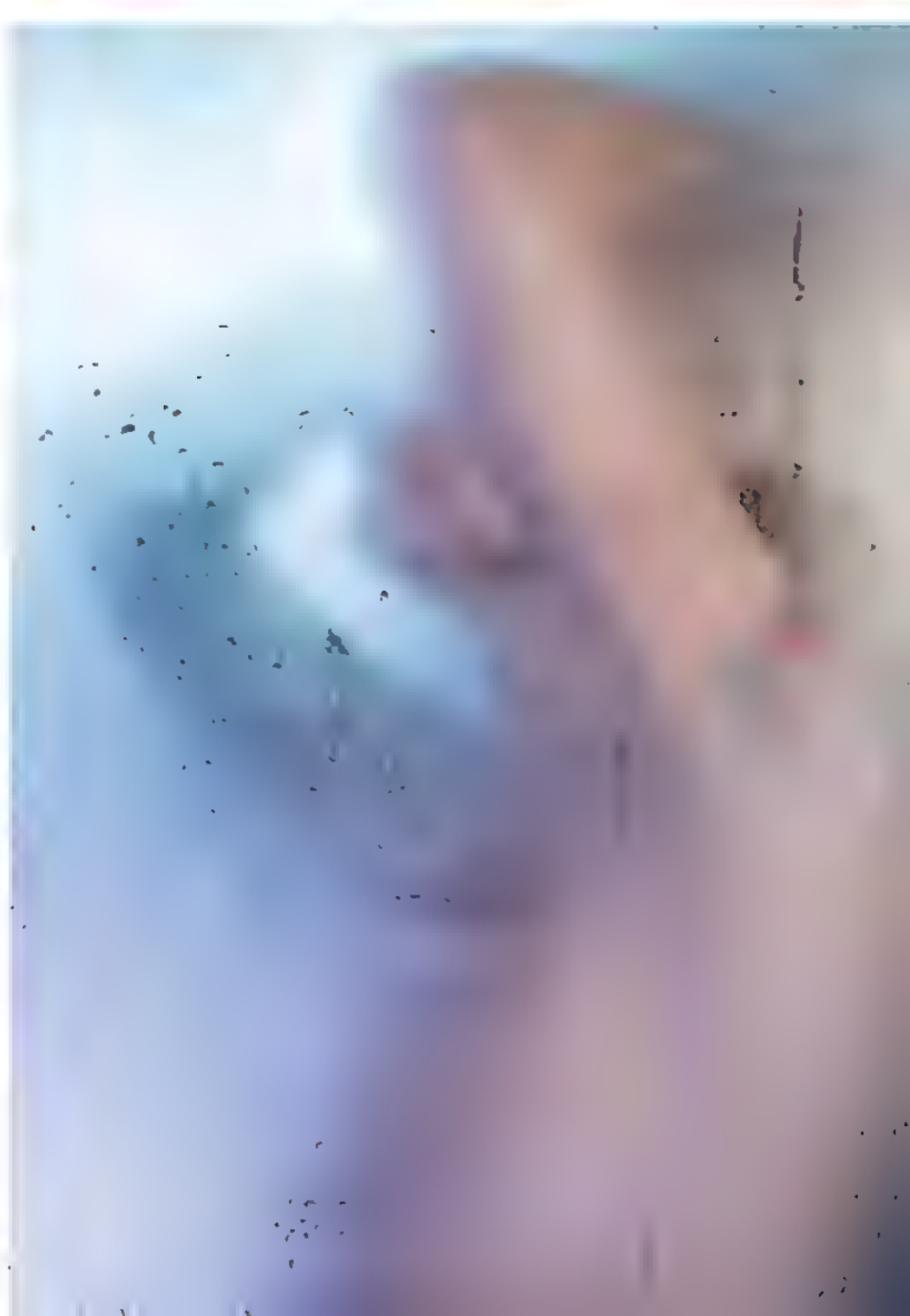
Although not exactly a household name, Minter is widely respected in the arts community, first gaining notoriety in the 1980s through a series of exhibits at the feminist gallery Gracie Mansion and later by receiving a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship, in 1998. Since then, her photographs, paintings and videos have been shown in galleries and museums around the world, including at the 2006 Whitney Biennial.

Unlike many of her peers, Minter boldly straddles fine art and commercial art. She refuses to be relegated to one way of making, or presenting, her images. In her 2006 work *Shit Kicker,* for example, she takes the idea of "shoe porn" and presents a model in snakeskin stilettos kicking up mud. As the model's ankles torque, you wonder if she's being dragged back to a dancing partner or pivoting toward freedom. In 2016's *Deep Frost* (pictured opposite, bottom left), we see a tongue pressed on frozen glass. The tension is palpable as the icy landscape is cleared by the heat of the model's breath. Few other visual artists are so committed to the erotics of the everyday or to the sticky sweetness of what it means to be alive.

Minter has also left her mark on pop culture, working with the likes of Miley Cyrus, Lady Gaga and Pamela Anderson. In 2007, she shot Anderson for the European art magazine *Parkett*. "I took all her makeup off and gave her bangs," says Minter. "I want women to have images of themselves for their own pleasure and amusement." In 2008, she collaborated with the legendary streetwear brand Supreme on three skateboard decks. Minter's 2009 video *Green Pink Caviar*, which depicts a woman's tongue languorously swirling green liquid candy around a sheet of glass, served as a backdrop during part of Madonna's "Sticky and Sweet" tour; the eight-minute video was later displayed on digital billboards above Sunset Boulevard and Times Square. *Gossip*

"Art h story has always sanctified women I want them to be sexy, sensuous and beautiful." **Opening pages:** Big Mouth, 2017 **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** Chin Up, 2019, Big Breath, 2016; to be titled (work in progress); Deep Frost, 2016 (all enamel on metal and previously unpublished)





Girl fans may recall the large-scale Minter pieces in the van der Woodsens' foyer. And in 2013, Minter had a dancing cameo in Jay-Z's star-studded "Picasso Baby" music video. (Both Madonna and the Carter family are Minter collectors.)

Minter's studio practice has also aimed at reaching new audiences in unexpected places. Back in 1990 she purchased air time during *Late Show With David Letterman, The Arsenio Hall Show and Nightline* — at a cost of $1,800 per 30 seconds — to promote her *100 Food Porn* exhibition at the Simon Watson gallery, reportedly becoming the first artist to advertise on late-night television.

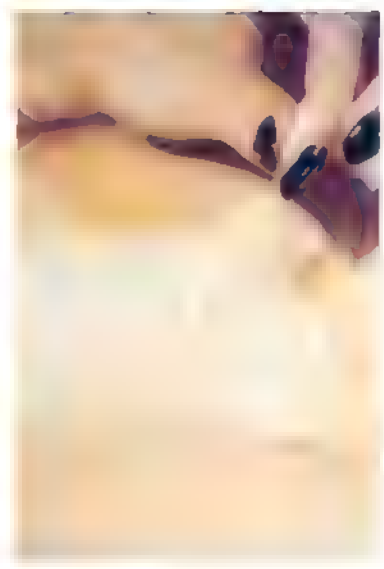
In her 2016 museum retrospective *Pretty/Dirty*, curated by art scholars Bill Arning and Elissa Auther (selections from which are featured in these pages), Minter presented a comprehensive look into her practice without shying away from work that wasn't received well critically. Take her 1989 *Porn Grid* series, composed of rasterized pop art paintings of men and women giving blow jobs. The images, all inspired by real porn, were immediately rejected by some of her feminist allies. "Nobody has politically correct fantasies," she tells me. "And there was this giant anti-porn movement happening because of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. They really wanted to ban any sexual imagery whatsoever, and I love porn." Rather than turn away from complicated subject matter, Minter chose to see her work come to fruition in its rawest and truest sense.

Minter has continued to create art that challenges viewers to reexamine the way they define beauty and, by extension, depictions of pleasure.

In 2012 Playboy invited Minter to participate in an independently produced project that ultimately became a one-off supplement to this magazine, entitled *Playboy A–Z*. She began creating her *Bush* series, which provided the visuals used for the letter *B*. Over eight months, Playboy paid models to grow out their pubic hair, and Minter photographed each of them. In the images, we see subjects with manicured nails showcasing their luscious, bushy pubic areas. Well lathered and representing every color of the rainbow, each bush serves as a call to action for pop culture

"NOBODY HAS POLITICALLY CORRECT FANTASIES."

"I want women to own their sexual agency." **Opposite, from top:** Orange Crush, 2009, enamel on meta ; Green P nk Cav.ar, 2009, video stil



"One thing I was invested in was including pubic hair from women of all races and colors." **Clockwise from top:** Plush #9, #7 and #18; **opposite:** the original incarnation of Plush #2 (all archival ink-jet photos)

and art history to celebrate pubes. "There's nothing wrong with pubic hair, and it's been totally erased in art history. We all know Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* and that's it," Minter says. One has to wonder: Why are there so few nonpornographic images of pubic hair — male, female or across the gender spectrum?

Two of the *Bush* photos were selected for the A–Z project — and both were reshot, in Minter's words, "behind wet glass to obscure them slightly." One of the images was flipped on the page, resulting in a perspective that doesn't reflect the model's point of view as Minter intended. The original version of that photo, as well as other *Bush* images unpublished in *Playboy A–Z*, are presented here.

In late 2014, Minter evolved the *Bush* series into a book called *Plush*. "I tried to make the images so beautiful that they could be in any house, gallery or museum," she says, "but as soon as people realize what they're looking at, they don't want them anymore. I don't care. I'm still making paintings and shooting different people."

I was curious why Minter wanted to share more *Bush/Plush* images in PLAYBOY now. "The new PLAYBOY has a fresh vision of female agency," she explains. "The women own their sexuality." Like a true Can cerian, Minter brings love to each project and faith to every opportunity. She's an artist who knows who she is and what she hopes to give. "My experience has been that if you feel absolutely terrified to do something, then it's probably legitimate."

Minter's life and work serve as reminders that there's always more good to be done. This fall, she'll continue to work with Swing Left, as well as Downtown for Democracy and Planned Parenthood, doing her part to fight against this administration. Almost every thread of our conversation eventually circles back to the struggle for freedom — even when we're talking about pleasure, which, as her artwork makes clear, often comes in unexpected forms.

"Pleasure is transitory," she says. "I have to find pleasure in being of service or doing activism or helping other individuals. That lasts longer than great sex, because even when I have all the things I thought would satisfy me, they never do." ■

PLAYMATE

JENNA STARR

Photography by **Miles Long | @mileslong4real**
MUA **@gypsecouture**
PR **@ratnipproductions**

PLAYMATE

PLAYMATE

We're happy to have you feature on Playboy! Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? In 2016, I was asked to do a photoshoot and I didn't think I was the model type, but I went with it and just trusted the photographer. Then, I had other photographers contact me to do more photoshoots. I started an OnlyFans and was contacted by Brazzers to be a feature on one of their scenes and my career has just taken off from there.

Having a full schedule must make it difficult for you to get much alone time, talk to us about the top 3 must-dos to ensure you fit in some well-deserved downtime? I always make time for myself by organizing my schedule. It's important to make time for yourself.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? It means a lot to me for others to see that it is who I am and to set an example for others to know that it's not all about looks but having that business mentality and that you can do it too if you put in the work and set your mind to it.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions people have about what you do? That I won't have a relationship or love that my family will disown me, and that I will have no boundaries.

What does freedom of self-expression mean to you? Just being myself, allowing me to be comfortable with myself and expressing myself freely.

We absolutely love your Instagram, your content is very dynamic, inspirational, and downright sexy, could you perhaps tell us what your personal experience as an influencer has been like? It is a lot of work and consistency. You don't have to post a picture and people like it. Persistence, consistency and fighting through the days you want to quit. Fighting through some of the negativity that comes with it.

3 things that you can't go a day without. Coffee, positive energy and amazing sex.

What about those crazy DMs you must receive! Care to share a few funny stories regarding those? I get a lot of DMs and I do my best to get to all of them. I wouldn't know where to begin.

Now we're sure you experience a lot of male attention on and offline, any advice you would like to give to men out there who are hoping to catch your eye the right way? How I'm treated is most important and my designer wish list is a great way to get my attention.

What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? Toxic behavior, nagging and dishonesty

That said, what advice would you have to give to all women out there when it comes to love and relationships? Choose you and don't settle

Thank you so much for sitting down with us and letting us get to know you! Any last words for our readers out there? "Thank you so much for your support and believing in me and giving me the opportunity to display my talents and attributes."

PLAYMATE

FACE-TO-FACE WITH

TORO Y MOI

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MANCY GANT**

The multitalented musician rode the crest of chillwave, then dove head-first into exploring creativity and the joy of connection

BY **ANDREA DOMANICK**

"Wanna go up on the roof?" Chaz Bear asks me with a puckish grin.

His gusto catches me off guard. It has been a long day here at Company, the art studio and record label that Bear, otherwise known as experimental music act Toro y Moi, founded in Oakland, California. Last night he was here producing new music till five A.M., only to return hours later for a packed itinerary that includes being photographed, filmed and interviewed by PLAYBOY. As he heads into the last portion (it's now near sunset), Bear's energy hasn't wavered, and he's eager for me to see more of his world.

Reaching up, he pops a heavy circular access door installed above industrial pipes. A column of light pours in and bathes the rear of Company's second-floor recording studio. The opening, barely wider than his shoulders, resembles a submarine escape hatch. Passing through it requires some skilled scrambling between a ladder and a metal power box on the wall. Bear ascends, his legs dangling comically before he hoists himself up.

"You coming?" he asks, flashing that same grin. There's no knowing what lies above. But because Bear is a virtuoso — his creative exploits have positioned him as one of today's most daring and inspired cross-platform artists — chasing him into the sunset is a welcome pursuit.

• • •

A decade has passed since Bear, now 32, breached pop-cultural consciousness as Toro y Moi, a solo project birthed in a dorm room by a South Carolina raised skater misfit who loved J Dilla and Panda Bear. The hypnagogic pop sound and anxiously lackadaisical disposition of his 2010 debut LP, Causers of This, earned him a cult following and helped usher in a rapidly hyped musical movement called chillwave — a microgenre marked by nostalgia, escapism and glazed resignation. The embrace of chillwave and its theme of youthful abandonment was no doubt bolstered by 2008's fraught climate of recession and high unemployment.

But chillwave's star burned hot and fast, eventually cooling in the face of early-2010s hipster malaise. In retrospect, even if Toro y Moi is considered a progenitor of the genre, the association discounts the stylistically omnivorous explorations of his succeeding eight studio albums, two mixtapes and three EPs — releases fueled not by trends but by his love for exploration.

Today, Toro y Moi is just one facet of Chaz Bear, an artist whose imagination is central to his holistic identity and whose accomplishments read more like career-test results than a boilerplate biography. He's Chazwick Bradley Bear, né Bundick — singer, songwriter, producer, graphic designer, painter and album-cover artist; founder of Company Records; DJ and purveyor of dance music as Les Sins; collaborator with Travis Scott, Flying Lotus and Tyler, the Creator (among others); honoree of "Chaz Bundick Day" as bestowed by Berkeley's mayor; and workaholic by his own admission

"I noticed that before my work got to where it is now, I was seeking pleasure in the creative process, in the genres I was seeking to re-create," Bear tells me. "The romance has shifted from the creative part to the enjoyment of people's expressions."

That shift is a hallmark of Toro y Moi's latest, this year's *Outer Peace*. The album not only marks Toro y Moi's sharpest stylistic turn yet — slinky R&B production, electronic dance beats and wide-eyed storytelling — it's also a thematic examination of Bear himself and his belief that one's artistic energy and potential are bound to the connections we share with the world around us.

• • •

Back on Company's rooftop: "Sometimes, on a clear day without all the fog, you can see the Golden Gate," Bear says, gesturing in the haze. Contrary to my expectations, the roof — an expanse of tar paper and stucco strewn with bottle caps — is unremarkable. What is remarkable is what surrounds it. The cascading hills of Berkeley and Kensington are to the northeast. A BART train careers by, the grid of residential Oakland beams in the low sun and peaks of construction protrude into the San Francisco skyline.

Surrounded by almost a dozen studios in this industrial arts complex, Company's patch of roof suggests humility. For Bear, it's an improvised island of escape from the mental and emotional grind below.

"This is just another normal day here at Company — this kind of thing, these people around," Bear says about the day's events. "It's fine; I love it But if you're trying to wrap up a project, you can't really think here."

Only recently has Bear come to understand that embracing creative control also means knowing when to relinquish it. "Honestly, I didn't learn about taking care of myself until, like, three years ago. I didn't do things for my own emotional enjoyment until I was single again," he says, referring to his short-lived break from partner Samantha Beardsley. (The two are now married, they both took the "Bear" surname when they wed) "You have to live through that. I was getting more and more depressed when I was making [2017's] Boo Boo. My brain wouldn't stop moving, and I couldn't get away from the computer Like, Damn, I gotta design this, I gotta write this up, I gotta tech this thing. I was giving

myself all the work and never being like, Okay, maybe you should just sleep in today."

Living in Portland at the time of *Boo Boo*'s release, Bear skipped touring the new album — known to be the most lucrative part of a musician's career — to take up painting and hiking and to travel down to the Bay Area to embed himself in the art scene there. "I never gave myself a support system, and you need that for when you don't have your person," he says. "I had to force myself to stop being so introverted and just go make friends, because you're gonna drive yourself crazy."

When he moved back to Oakland in 2017, he formally opened Company Records. Ten years after Toro y Moi's inception, Bear is still DIY, but he's swapped his dorm room for a label and an incubator. Today, Company includes a print shop, a recording studio, a rehearsal space and a gallery, all of which are accessible to local artists. Providing such resources allows Bear to step out of the spotlight while retaining creative control, but it also means his lonewolf endeavors have to take a backseat.

Despite (or maybe because of) his penchant for putting in overtime, personal retreats have emerged as an essential part of his creative process. Last year he decamped to a writer's cabin outside San Francisco to complete *Outer Peace*. There, amid the solitude, wood paneling and a mounted cow's skull, he took stock of the work he'd produced while in existential free-fall.

"*Outer Peace* is successful because I got a chance to love every step of the process," he says. "Before, it was kind of a burden. Now I just got to play creative director."

Bear's voice takes on a quiet reverence as he reflects on the building's surrounding arts community, which inspired Company's communal approach to making art. "The whole reason I moved back from Portland was because I got grand fathered into this spot when my friend moved away," he says a little breathlessly. "It's all just iconic artists. Just amazing shit."

Behind us sits a row of studios, the windows of which offer glimpses into the practices of printers, metalworkers, sculptors and painters, many of whom, Bear says, have been tenants since the rent-controlled complex popped up in the 1970s. "These guys are like OG. That's why I feel so honored to have this space. They're of that era, the beatniks who moved here," he says. "That movement influenced this area to become a hub of open minds. You feel more at home here."

The older generations of artists who've endured also recharge Bear, even if he's aware that the playing field has changed. There has never been a more paradoxical time to be an artist: Hyperconnectivity is at war with cultural disconnection. More money is being exchanged by fewer hands. Corporate power precludes bottom-up innovation, forcing fringe industries to exist on their own terms and to rely on one another for community.

"You have to brand yourself. That's what it comes down to. It sucks, but it's no different than being the local real estate guy who's got his picture on every bench," Bear says. "If you're going to give yourself away, why not put it into your work?"

For his part, Bear has come a long way from the milieu that launched his career. No matter his and his veteran neighbors' aspirations, he recognizes they can control only what they produce. And they recognize that honing their skills, if focused enough, can only lead to beautiful results. "We just want to make things that help us connect," he says. "If that's the motive, what it's going to come down to is that face-to-face interaction is still going to hold value in the future."

Face-to-face connections are valuable because they can't be co opted, of course. Ultimately, they're reminders of the control we have over the world that surrounds us. It's not much, but maybe that's just fine.

"I see myself as a local shop owner. I don't aspire to take over the industry or anything. I just want to do good and serve who I can within my reach," he says. "And take it one step at a time. It has sort of been my approach this whole time. It's just building something in town."

As we lower ourselves back into the studio, Bear asks me if I'm hungry. "I'm kind of starving," he says.

We hastily gather our things to get to the restaurants before they close. Bear does a final sweep, locking doors, shutting cabinets, powering down equipment and switching off lights. The complex's heavy steel doors latch shut behind us with a decisive thud.

"Shit," Bear says, pivoting. He's forgotten his keys. His co-workers left hours ago, so we have to wait for a superintendent to let us in. I wander outside the complex's communal garden, where the branches of a small tree hang heavy with plums.

He plucks one and hands it to me. The flavor is floral and honey sweet, unusual and familiar. We stand there, feasting on plums and laughing at the absurdity. It's not what we'd planned, but it's satisfying just the same. ■

“I don’t aspire to take over the industry or anything. I just want to serve who I can within my reach.”

History

STRIPPED SERIES

SILK ROAD TO STRIP CLUBS: POLE DANCING

We sit back watching the girls of the chrome twirl scandalously around us. Drops of sweat bead, their muscle tone glistening and their beauty appears amplified by the exotic atmosphere surrounding us. This form of dance when placed in a modern cabaret, is intimately thrilling. You tingle from head to toe with this sense of intense anticipation and sexual excitement. In this moment, you're likely not so concerned with where this form of dance originated, but perhaps when you sit for your morning Facebook scrolling, your mind is less concerned with your draw to exotic dancer's pheromones. I know some of you have considered thoughts like this during your less erotic moments. I surely do not stand alone in my curiosity.

The art of dance is as old as the human species itself. However, it was not until about 5,000 years ago, that we can see the first depictions of performing acrobats and jugglers. It would not be long before acrobatics would migrate further east from Egypt and Greece, and eventually we would find poles being utilized for performance on the silk roads. In 9CE Chinese acrobats were now part of the "Show of One Hundred Skills". Later, scientist Zhang Heng (78-130C) wrote a work call the Prose of the Western Capital in which he vividly describes pole climbing and balancing the acrobats performed during his time. The history of Pole for dance and fitness goes much deeper than I could have ever imagined when I decided to first research this topic during the fourth year of BA in Canada.

Pole eventually made it to India, where it was included in a manual titled Mannasollasa (1135AD). This was utilized for the military training of young Chalukyan princes. Later in India, this became a sport named Mallakhamba. In 1936 Mallakhamba was selected for a demonstration sport at the Olympics in Berlin. Earlier in 1793, the same year the first American circus emerged, Gymastik Fur Die Jugend was published featuring a detailed drawing which depicted vertical poles used for gymnastics.

Pole would make its way as a circus art, sport (through gymnastics first and later as an independent event), and fitness tool. Scandalous wear and demonstrations of the human body are nothing new in sport and circus. It should be of no surprise, that we would inevitably find circus arts of all forms in the strip clubs of today. An article written in 1853 for the New York Herald describes "Christy's Minstrels" a concert featuring Negro melodies, burlesque shakes, and Chinese acrobats. This would mark the beginnings of the collaboration and mixing of acrobats, circus, burlesque and vaudeville together. Pole would spread across North America first by Japanese performers, through the Circus boom of the 1870's, which was catapulted by the completion of the Transcontinental railroad in 1869. Girlie shows became a staple to these circuses and "Snorting Pole" quickly became a signature act at these side shows. This was because the center pole often hugged the stage of these smaller tents, making it an accessible prop. The popularity of "Snorting Pole" acts led to fixated poles on go-go stages and later in cabarets and gentlemen's clubs. The circus boom ended with the Great Depression, shortly after Charlie Chaplin danced on a pole in his 1928 film "The Circus". By the 1960's-70's acrobatic and stripping performers needed a new venue to work within outside of the circus. These performers were often multi-faceted, not much different from today's successful strippers. The women of the girlie shows often doubled as acrobats. Naturally, this led acrobatic and girlie show acts like pole to hit the stages of the men's clubs we associate them with today. Contrary to public belief, research has taught me exotic pole dancing for both fitness and bodily display, began with men. Later it became almost exclusively a female dominated industry in North America. While many believe its use as a fitness device was pioneered by women, it has been used for fitness in all its forms, first by men. First in India with the Mannasollasa. Later, around the world by famous physical culturalist Eugen Sandow, and in the United States as late as 1940 by the US Navy.

Currently Pole is making its moves towards becoming an Olympic sport in its most modern form using 12ft 45mm metal poles. Women, men, and children of all ages participate worldwide. Often you can swing into cities like Vegas to be captivated by Cirque du Soleil artists performing Chinese Pole. When you get tired of sitting at that slot trying to nail that jackpot you can slide over to the local pole fitness gym to sweat on their chrome. Pole is everywhere around us, and has been for quite some time.

Next time you stop by the local men's club to lighten your pocket, you can stare at that staple fixture, located center stage, with a new appreciation for its rich and long history. Make sure to tip that dancer and don't blame me when you leave broke.

LANA
MAE
Instagram @lanamaewhereabouts
@spicypeachphotography
PR @ratnipproductions

what you
to do is the
I know to avoid
of thinking you
something to lose
are already naked
is no reason not
follow your heart.

We're happy to have you feature on Playboy! Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? First I'd like to say thank you, I'm so grateful to be here! I started modeling when I was 18 years old. A friend and talented fashion designer, Cheyenne Root invited me to walk her design down the runway at Immaculata University! There, I networked with agents from a talent group called Mainline Models, and found myself in the salon chairs of stylists and on brightly colored runways in casinos- it was all very exciting to me! I worked with a photographer who goes by From The Rooftops, and had my first nude photoshoot which completely changed my career. We showcased my freshly inked angel wings without the constraints of clothing, and suddenly my tattoos became a muse for artists all over. I was graced with features in magazines and covers, and now I can hardly believe I'm here!

Having a full schedule must make it difficult for you to get much alone time, talk to us about the top 3 must-dos to ensure you fit in some well-deserved downtime... I'm a bit traditional. I like to stick to my little planner and pencil in the occasional day for myself, but I actually have the entirety of the morning all to myself, as well. First things first, I must wake up slowly to start my day with some B.O.B. (battery-operated boyfriend) self-love and some light yoga! Second, I need to stretch out and take my pup, Rico for a walk to the dog park without my phone. It gives me the clarity I need for the day. Third, we come back, so I can water my little garden and read in the sunlight on my balcony. I like to fit in this morning ritual daily to share that peace with the people I meet later in the day!

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? Those are some of the traits I value most in myself, so it's important to me that my character shines through and encourages other people to reflect the same strength, intelligence, and ambition that we ultimately share. We can all learn so much from a woman of that caliber, which is why I look to other strong, intelligent, ambitious women for guidance, and strive to carry myself in ways that those women would themselves. I have an infectious lust for life that has driven me to push the limitations of my body, mind, and spirit in a disciplined way, and it has made me the woman I am today. I do this because I want to be the kind of woman that I, myself would look up to.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions people have about what you do? I believe we are moving away from those old notions of strippers, and sex workers as harlequins and whores. More and more people are giving a voice to the rising strong, intelligent, ambitious women of our industry. I was featured in "Peeled, the Documentary: "A Glimpse Beneath the Skin," a documentary dedicated to the Vayda Kiss Foundation. It's reason for being is to celebrate the women of the nightclub industry, who defy the laws of gravity and shatter expectations of the human body, and to break down those misconceptions of the stripper tale of woe. It is an empowering position to hold. Within this career path, there is opportunity for growth, travel, and the freedom to create your own schedule. Also, contrary to cinematic catty drama, the women are very friendly and supportive behind the scenes. Strippers are some of the most loyal friends and lovers I've known, and they sure know how to separate the boys from the men!

What does freedom of self-expression mean to you? I am who I am! It means I will give myself the space and freedom to be exactly who I am and feel exactly how I feel. Conversely, I will offer sovereignty to those around me to be exactly who they are and to express that in whatever way they feel comfortable, whether that is in wardrobe selection or ice cream preference. There is a level of respect that comes with the freedom of self-expression. You be you, and I'll be me, and it's okay if we like each other, but it's also okay if we don't.

We absolutely love your Instagram, your content is very dynamic, inspirational, and downright sexy, could you perhaps tell us what your personal experience as an influencer has been like? I feel I can hardly call myself an influencer! I like to think my role is more that of a connector. I bring people together with art, music, fashion, and movement.

3 things that you can't go a day without. I can't go a day without Rico cuddles, a fruit smoothie, or my planner!

What about those crazy DMs you must receive! Care to share a few funny stories regarding those? I'm very active in my DMs, so I've run into some endearing and also some jaw-dropping messages! I'll leave out those dirty details. What my fans say to me stays with me...

Now we're sure you experience a lot of male attention on and offline, any advice you would like to give to men out there who are hoping to catch your eye the right way? Chivalry is not dead, boys! And neither is the artistry of the tease! I take notice in the little things men do to treat a lady right because I go out of my way to treat my man right. Don't rush! A man who is slow to take what he wants is a man who gets what he wants. Effort and communication are key with me!

What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? Lying. It signifies fear, and a man who is more afraid of my reaction than the repercussions of telling the truth lacks integrity and virtue. If we don't have honesty and trust, we don't have a relationship. Open and honest communication looks way sexier on a man!

That said, what advice would you have to give to all women out there when it comes to love and relationships? Ladies, you've heard it a million times, don't ever settle. It isn't fair to keep each other from the love that you both deserve! It is true that you cannot love someone else until you love yourself, so you come first. Some people are meant to stay, some are meant to go, but everyone that comes along is meant to teach us something. You don't need to learn lessons the hard way. Romantic relationships are like dessert, you could probably do without a slice of cake, but man is it delicious to have! Don't rob yourself of the peace that comes with solitude for the fear of being alone.

Thank you so much for sitting down with us and letting us get to know you! Any last words for our readers out there? Thank you so much for having me! I love you, readers! Be proud of the person you are and follow your heart. You have no reason not to, you made it this far. The world is your playground! Our time is short... Get the tattoo!

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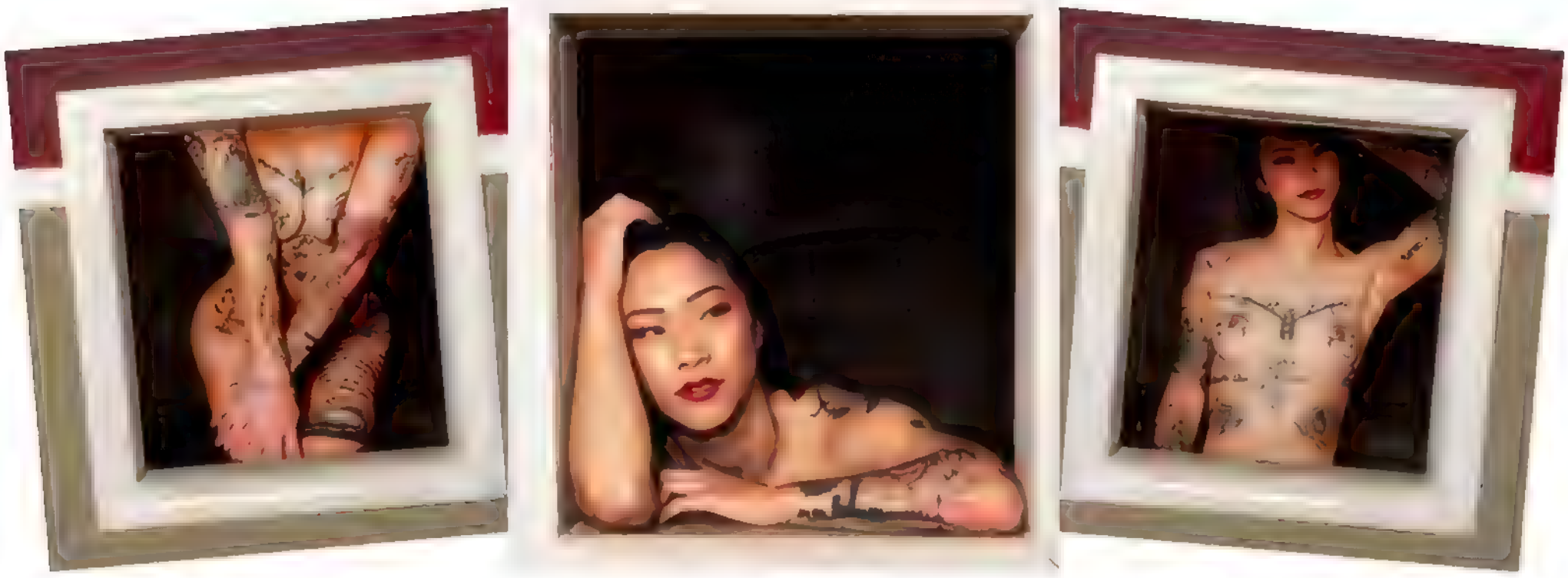

MEMBERS
ONLY
BY LANE MOORE

PLAYBOY is world famous for its nudes. So closely associated is the publication with sexy depictions of women that I was shocked to discover the magazine has, across its more than 65 years, run plenty of photos of naked or near-naked men.

Nude dudes, in PLAYBOY? Now that's worth a little exploration.

So I decided to investigate. Whipping out my proverbial magnifying glass, I would become a privates detective, a gumshoe of guys, a dick of… dick. What would the pages reveal?

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As I sifted through the nearly 750 issues that constitute the PLAYBOY archive, a couple of things became abundantly clear. First, the images of unclothed women far outnumber those of nude or semi-nude men, which isn't terribly shocking. But it is worth noting, because my impression had been that PLAYBOY was designed to show women without any men at all — no distractions that might get in the way of the ultimate fantasy. And second, though scantily clad men do show up in PLAYBOY's pages, the true full monty is rare, and a full-on hard on appears to be a unicorn — that is, it doesn't exist. (I would love to be wrong about this.)

I was excited by my first sighting of a nearly naked guy — not because it's an especially sexy photo (it's not) but because it occurs in the December 1953 PLAYBOY — the very first issue. On the back inside cover, a blackand-white photo shows a young man wearing nothing but a turban, a codpiece and a saucy smile. The image promotes an article in the next issue about a swinging "art ball," and that January 1954 piece features front and back photos of another nearly nude man, this one dressed as a satyr—horns, cleverly placed ivy leaves and a perky tail secured by God knows what. Fun party!

On the hunt for naked men in PLAYBOY, things seemed off to a cheeky and playful start. But alas, the fun, sassy "oops, my towel might fall" photos quickly dry up, with nary a pec to be seen for what feels like years.

Thankfully, once the 1960s and 1970s hit, we get back to intermittent pictorials spotlighting guys who, in keeping with the free-spirited times, take off those confining clothes, man. These photo features often revolve around well-known actors in on-set photography from upcoming movies. Notable members of this elite gentlemen's club include Peter Sellers (carrying a guitar to protect his modesty in the nudistcamp whodunit *A Shot in the Dark*), Elliott Gould (manhood obscured in a sudsy bathtub for his film *Move*) and David Carradine (steaming up the rails with Barbara Hershey in *Boxcar Bertha*).

Though I'm sure these sets were professional and chaste, some of the 1970s pictorials remind me of screen-grabbed porn. Looking at you, Kris Kristofferson and Sarah Miles, whose "oh my" July 1976 photo spread (promoting the movie *The Sailor Who Fell From Grace With the Sea*) showcases no fewer than five different sex moves.

Frankly, it's nice to see a man like Kristofferson doing his part for readers' entertainment, even if we don't get to see his junk. The more I thought about it, the more sense this sort of male nudity seemed to make in PLAYBOY. The magazine began as a kind of instruction manual for straight American men, so what better way to illustrate the epitome of that lifestyle than by putting naked men with naked women in sexy situations? It's like an easy-to-follow visual aid to living the dream — five sex moves you too can master! — but without any visible wangs to distract men from their affirmed heterosexuality.

And then, in the August 1973 issue, I hit the jackpot: what I believe to be the magazine's first full-on penis photo — a shot of porn star Harry Reems in a…*relaxed* state.

*In The Vatican Sex Manual, Eric Idle and a model demonstrate (clockwise from top left) "The Fred Astaire," "The Papal Bull," "The Trade-Union Congress" and "Ninety-Six" — just a few of the "many thousands of positions in which sex cannot be enjoyed." **Above:** Outtakes from the December 1971 pictorial Personal Visions of the Erotic reveal a fully nude man and woman, in the photo selected for publication, the woman is pictured solo.*

It's a seminal moment for PLAYBOY. Even better, the magazine didn't just publish that groundbreaking photo and then decide it had filled the penis quota for the year: The following issue includes an equally revealing photo of actor Johnny Crawford promoting his appropriately titled flick *The Naked Ape* (which happens to be a Playboy Productions movie).

That this tiny uptick in male nudity comes in the early 1970s is no surprise; porn was pumping into the mainstream, and the so-called pubic wars, in which PLAYBOY and *Penthouse* published raunchier and raunchier images, were raging. By the 1980s, it seems a kinder, gentler era of male nudity had dawned in PLAYBOY, as opposed to the frequently intense sexuality of the 1970s. Dolph Lundgren is like a pale beefy mannequin, more prop than player in his 1985 pictorial with then girlfriend supermodel Grace Jones. In 1986's Double Take, a nude Don Johnson frolics by a waterfall with Melanie Griffith in an outtake captured for a story that had run a decade earlier — a johnson-free Johnson pictorial.

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To get a sense of why certain decisions regarding nude male photography were made in the past, I spoke with Gary Cole, PLAYBOY's longtime photography director, who held the role from 1975 until 2009. He quickly clarified the penis-shy editorial perspective.

"The subhead under the magazine's cover logo read 'Entertainment for Men,' " Cole says. And though the magazine had a generally welcoming attitude regarding all sexual orientations, it's obvious the subhead in question could more accurately have read "Entertainment for Heterosexual Men." Unsurprisingly for the world's preeminent men's magazine, the editors operated "on the assumption that our readers were not particularly interested" in photos of naked men.

"Male nudity was not a subject we dwelled on," Cole adds, "though it was occasionally included in the magazine, especially in features such as Sex in Cinema and *The Year in Sex*."

And he's absolutely right. Flipping through these annual assemblages of film stills and nip slips, I saw a number of stars and leading men naked or close to it: David Bowie, Peter Fonda, Dennis Rodman and Antonio Banderas, to name just a handful, who all appeared alongside plenty of color photography of women celebs and actresses.

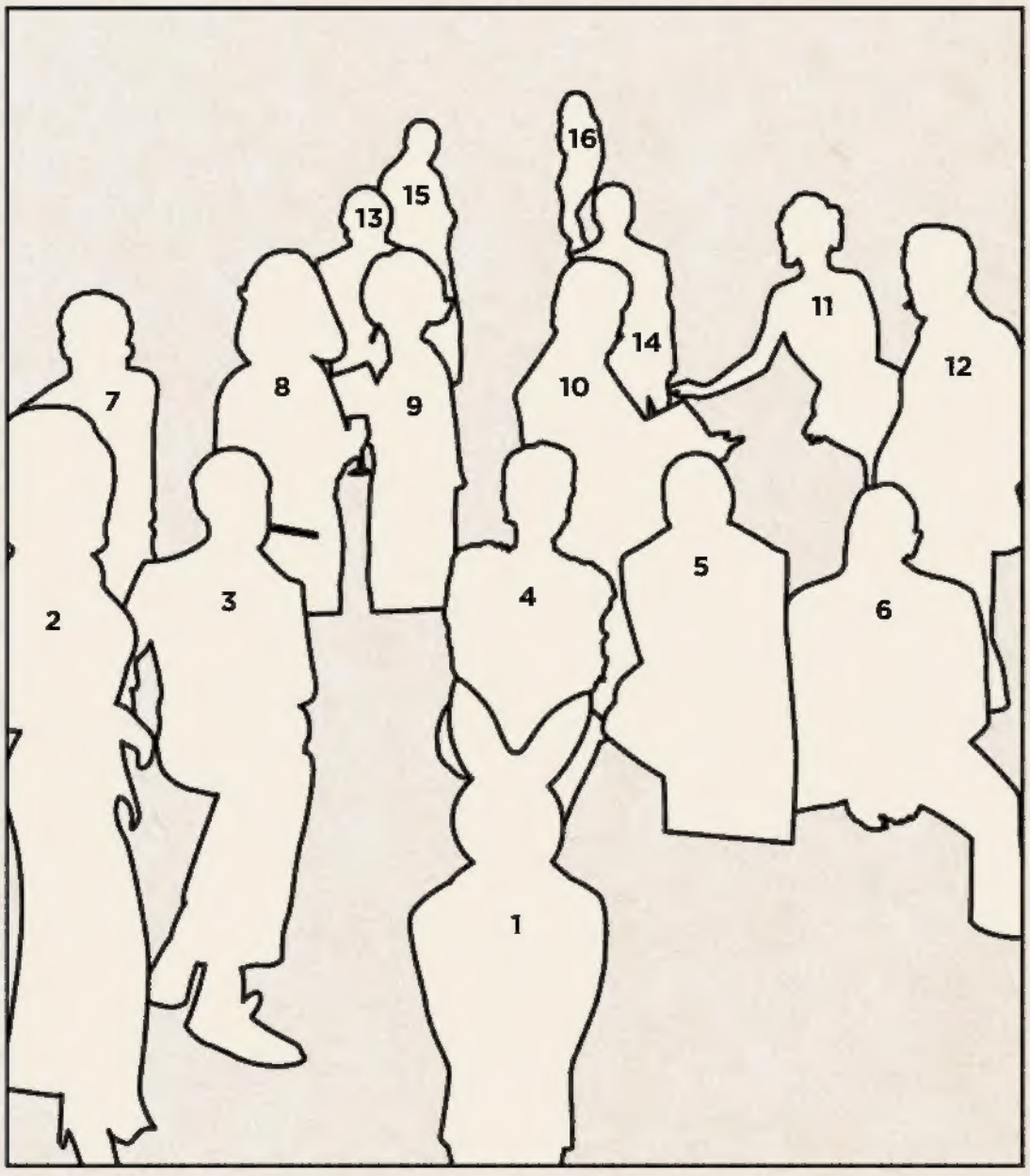
From time to time male skin was also deployed to great comic effect in PLAYBOY. (See, for example, Steve Martin on the January 1980 cover, wearing only a white tux jacket and what might best be described as a diaper, which I guess is sexy to someone, somewhere.) Perhaps the most stellar example I found of nudity in service of hilarity is *The Vatican Sex Manual*. Appearing in the November 1976 issue, the pictorial is actually excerpted from comedian Eric Idle's *Rutland Dirty Weekend Book*, in which the Monty Python star and a female model, both in various states of undress, demonstrate for the camera several amusingly asexual sex positions such as "The Fred Astaire" (butt to butt) and "The Missionary Position" (praying while kneeling on opposite sides of a bed).

"I always loved this gag," Idle tells me via e-mail, "a how notto-have sex manual." He recalls feeling no awkwardness during the photo shoot. "I was fairly accustomed to being nude, as almost everyone swam naked in Provence in the summer in those days. It didn't bother me." (Interesting side note: Idle's wife, Tania Kosevich, is the jeans-shorted September 1974 PLAYBOY cover model.)

It's easy to imagine that if the editors had been as comfortable with the naked male body as Idle was, we might have seen more of it, for the potential benefit of all readers — regardless of sexual orientation or gender identification.

Maybe that time has finally come. The world has seen increased recognition and acceptance of sexual fluidity, and as a culture we're realizing that, yes, sexuality truly is rich and varied. Readers, like the population as a whole, come from across the sexual spectrum, so surely there's a market. Male nudity can be a beautiful thing to so many people — here's to entertainment for *all*. ■

A GALA FOR THE AGES: ANSWER KEY



Mr. Playboy (suave avatar of Playboy founder Hugh Hefner); 2. Barbi Benton (pictorial mainstay and *Playboy After Dark* entertainer who became Hefner's longtime partner and discovered the Los Angeles property that became Playboy Mansion West); 3. Ian Fleming (author and Playboy Interview subject whose James Bond character made several appearances in the magazine); 4. Janet Pilgrim (PLAYBOY s taffer who became a threetime Playmate); 5. Dick Gregory (trailblazing Playboy Club comic); 6. Shel Silverstein (longtime traveling cartoonist and correspondent); 7. Alex Haley (author of the first *Playboy Interview* and the magazine's most famous interviewer); 8. Christie Hefner (CEO of Playboy Enterprises for 20 years); 9. Alice K. Turner (influential longtime PLAYBOY fiction editor); 10. LeRoy Neiman (Femlin creator and PLAYBOY artist in residence); 11. Marilyn Monroe (cover model for the first issue and the magazine's only "Sweetheart of the Month"); 12. Lenny Bruce (comic whose *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People* PLAYBOY serialized in 1963 and 1964); 13. Ray Bradbury (frequent sci-fi contributor whose Fahrenheit 451 was serialized in 1954); 14. Miles Davis (performer at the first Playboy Jazz Fest and subject of the first *Playboy Interview*); 15. Alberto Vargas (pinup artist whose full-page illustrations were an early magazine staple); 16. Pamela Anderson (February 1990 Playmate and most frequent U.S. PLAYBOY cover model).

CLASSIC CARTOONS

"Damn it! Somebody's at the air lock!"

"I'd like to disassociate myself from the remarks of my companions, Miss."

"Our task, ladies and gentlemen, is to convince the American male that driving a small car is no reflection on the size of his genitalia."

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